Client Briefing Report: Demographic Analysis of Australia's Top Country-of-Birth Groups (1996–2016)

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1. Introduction

Understanding long-term demographic trends is essential for effective planning and policy development in the public sector. This report provides a comprehensive analysis of changes in Australia's population from 1996 to 2016, focusing on key characteristics such as country of birth (COB), age, gender, and state or territory of residence. The analysis is based on census data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), examined across ten selected COBs: Australia, England, New Zealand, China, India, the Philippines, Vietnam, Italy, South Africa, and Lebanon. These countries represent a diverse cross-section of migration origins, reflecting both historical and contemporary settlement patterns.

To support evidence-based decision making, the findings are presented through three interactive dashboards developed in Power BI. The first dashboard offers an overview of population trends across Australia's states and demographic segments. The second compares detailed patterns across the selected COBs. The third dashboard presents a data-driven narrative that addresses key analytical questions about migrant growth, age structure, gender composition, and geographic distribution.

The primary objective of this report is to generate meaningful insights into how Australia's population has evolved through migration over two decades, and to highlight the implications of these changes for future service delivery, infrastructure planning, and policy development.

2. Dashboard 1 – National and State Demographic Trends

2.1 Purpose and Scope

The first dashboard provides a national-level perspective of the demographic trends of Australia and its states across 5 census years ranging from 1996 to 2016. It shows how the total population has grown and shifted overtime between different regions along with the distribution in gender and age group. This context serves as a foundation for an insightful analysis of migration trends, presented in the following dashboards (2 and 3).
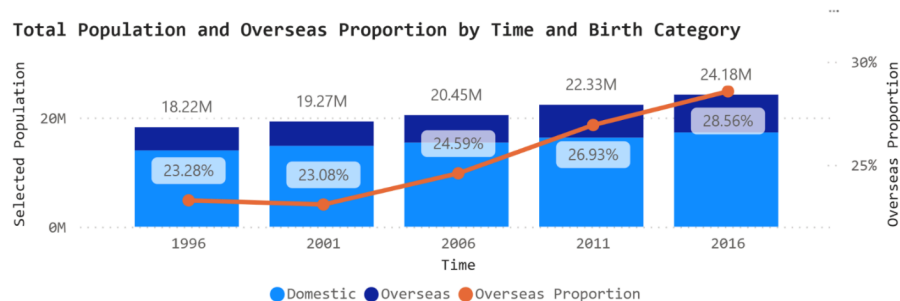
2.2 Key Insights

Figure 2.1 - Total Population and Overseas Proportion over Census Year (1996 - 2016)

Overall, there was a consistent increase in population growth at the national level with the total population increasing from 18.22 million in 1996 to 24.18 million in 2016, indiation an overall growth of 5.96 million people (24.64% increase over 20 years in total) (*Figure 2.1*). The steady rise highlights the continuous need of scheduling for development of infrastructure and housing in order to meet the growing number of residents. By examining the overseas proportion, there was an increasing proportion of overseas-born residents. In Particular, there was a rise from 23.28% to nearly 30% by 2026, underscoring the influence of migration on Australia' demographic landscape and setting the context for deeper analysis in the next dashboard.
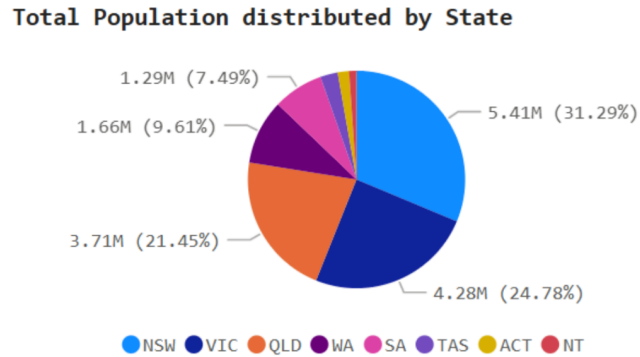
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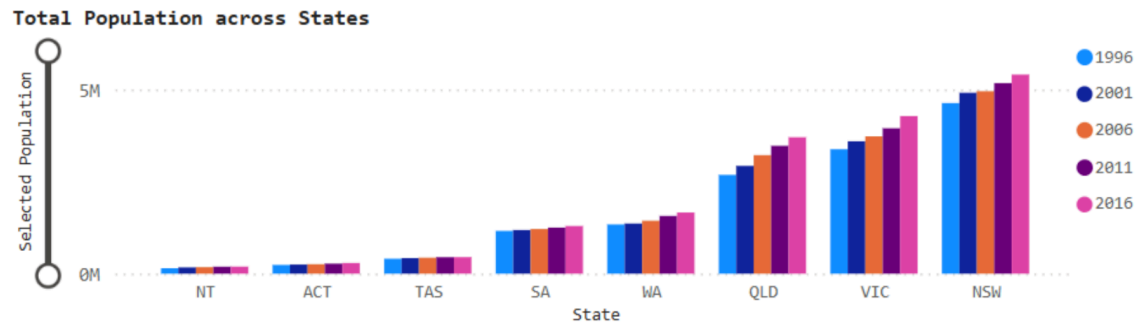**Figure 2.2** - Total Population distributed by State in 2016

Figure 2.3 - Total Population across States in 2016

According to *Figure 2.2* and *Figure 2.3,* New South Wales (NSW) and Victoria (VIC) showed the highest levels of growth and dominated the total population in 2016 at 31.98% and 25.53%, respectively. Queensland (QLD) and Western Australia (WA) also showed a notable proportion with 20.04% and 10.57% with stable growth, while the other states such as Tasmania (TAS), Southern Australia (SA), Tasmania (TAS), Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and Northern Territory (NT) remain relatively stable with minimal share of contribution. This highlights the trends in urbanisation patterns in Australia along with the population growth in major metropolitan regions (NSW or VIC).
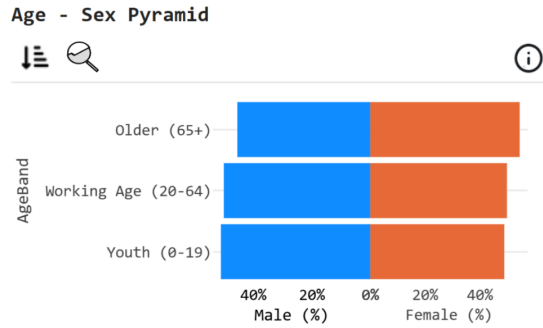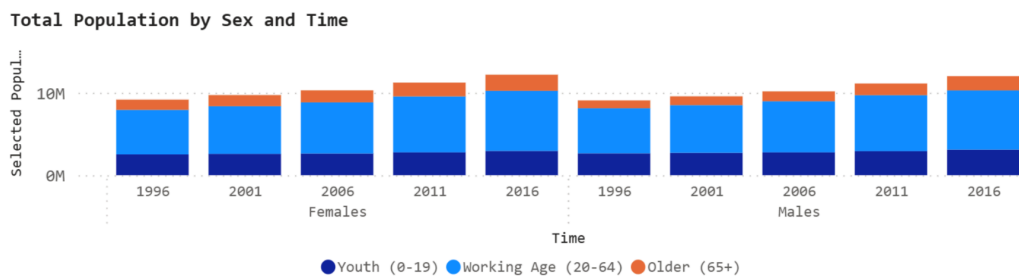
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Figure 2.4 - Age - Sex Pyramid in 2016

Figure 2.5 - Total Population by Sex over Census Year

Regarding the demographic structure shown in *Figure 2.4,* this visual reveals a balanced share of female and male in the total population, with females being slightly larger than males, across 3 different age groups including Youth (0 - 19), Working Age (20 - 64) and Older (65+). Collectively, *Figure 2.4* and *Figure 2.5* indicate an ageing trend as the proportion of individuals aged 65 and above had increased over the examined period. This shift in population age emphasised the need for health and aged care services in the following period.

3. Dashboard 2 – Demographic Comparison of Selected Countries of Birth

3.1. Overview of Selected COBs

From the national demographic analysis established in the first dashboard, the second dashboard focuses on the examination of the Australian population by focusing on ten countries of birth selected to reflect the broader context of migration. **Australia** (AUS) is included as the reference group, alongside nine overseas countries:

1. **England** (ENG)
2. **New Zealand** (NZL)
3. **China (excluding SARs and Taiwan)** (CHN)
4. **India** (IND)
5. **Philippines** (PHL)
6. **Vietnam** (VNM)
7. **Italy** (ITA)
8. **South Africa** (ZAF)
9. **Lebanon** (LBN)

These countries were chosen to represent a mix of regions and migration histories. Some, like England and Italy, reflect earlier waves of migration (which will be discussed in dashboard 3), while others, such as India, China and the Philippines, highlight more recent population growth linked to skilled migration and education pathways. This provides a comprehensive view of how different migrant communities have contributed to shaping Australia's population over time.

3.2 Key Insights

This dashboard provides insights into population growth, age and gender structure, and state-level distribution patterns across the five census periods from 1996 to 2016 considering 10 COBs.
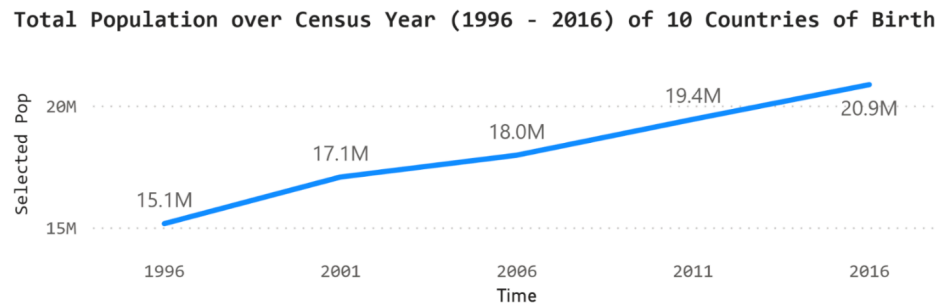
Total Population over Census Year (1996 - 2016) of 10 Countries of Birth

Figure 3.1 - Total Population over Census Year (10 COBS)

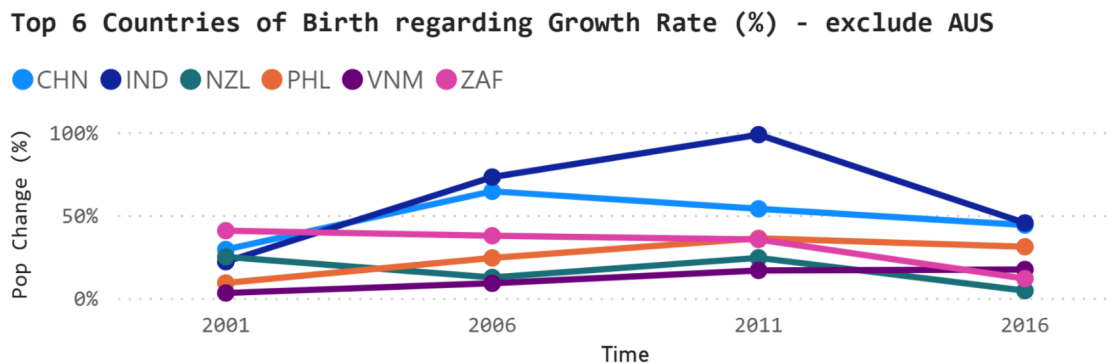**Top 6 Countries of Birth regarding Growth Rate (%) - exclude AUS**

Figure 3.2 - Top 6 Countries of Birth regarding Growth Rate (%)

Overall, considering 10 COBs, the total population had increased from 15.1 million to 20.9 million in 2016 *(Figure 3.1)*. As stated in *Figure 3.2,* there was significant growth of the Asian-born population in growth rate across the 20-year period. In particular, China and India show the highest growth throughout the examined period, emphasising the impact of skill migration or education-driven purposes.
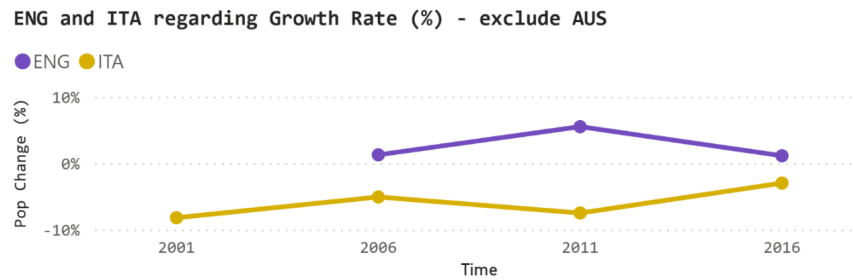
ENG and ITA regarding Growth Rate (%) - exclude AUS

Figure 3.3 - England and Italy regarding Growth Rate (%)

On the other hand, European countries such as England or Italy, which was a traditional European source, displayed a stabilising or slightly declining trend. This indicates the shift from earlier post-war migration waves to more recent arrivals from Asia and emerging countries.
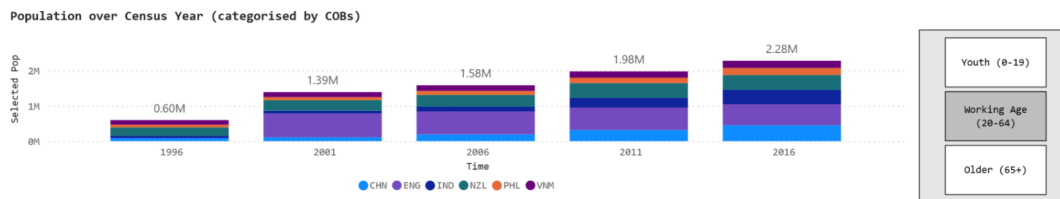
Figure 3.4 - Population under Working Age Over Census Year (categorised by top 6 COBs)

In addition, *Figure 3.4* further illustrates the aforementioned points. Among 10 COB, migrants from China, England, India, New Zealand, Philippines and Vietnam are predominantly of working age,in which 4 of them are Asian countries and New Zealand as part of the indirect migration of Asians. This supports their role in addressing labour market demands and contributing to Australia's economic productivity.
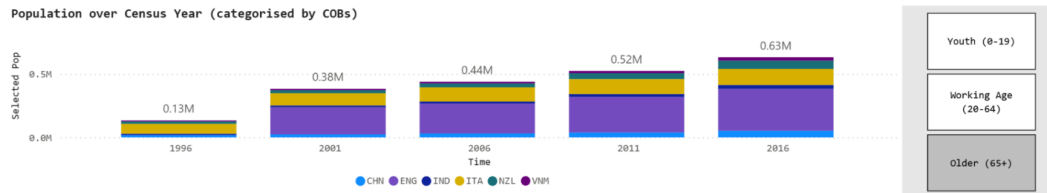
Figure 3.5 - Population under Working Age Over Census Year (categorised by top 6 COBs)

Meanwhile, England and Italy showed a noticeably higher proportion of older adults, consistent with an ageing population that might have arrived in earlier decades. This demographic pattern reflected long-established communities that were entering retirement, potentially requiring increased health and aged care support in the near future.

Figure 3.6 - Age-Sex Pyramid in 2016 (9 overseas COBs)
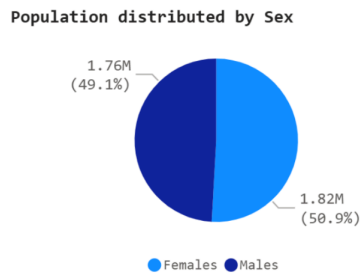
Gender distribution remains relatively balanced across most COBs (female - 50.9% and males - 49.1%). This trend may be attributed to the gendered nature of employment in sectors or family reunion visas. In addition, according to Inglis (2017), the surge in females population, especially from the Philippines, could be associated with the introduction of "marriage market".

Population distributed by State

- 0.05M (1.5%)
- 0.50M (14.08%)
- 1.15M (32.02%)
- 0.65M (18.18%)
- 0.93M (25.96%)

● NSW ● VIC ● QLD ● WA ● SA ● ACT ● TAS ● NT
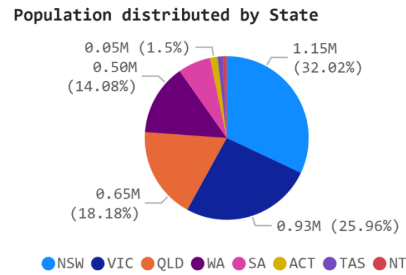
Figure 3.6 - Population Distributed by State (9 overseas COBs)

At a geographic level, the distribution of overseas-born populations remained highly concentrated in New South Wales and Victoria. These states accounted for over half of the overseas-born population, with NSW alone making up approximately 32%. This concentration reflects broader urbanisation trends and the role of major cities in attracting migrants through job availability, education opportunities, and cultural community networks. While other states such as Queensland and Western Australia also had significant migrant populations, their shares are comparatively lower.

4. Dashboard 3 – Storytelling and Migration Insights

The third dashboard presents an insightful perspective of demographic shifts among Australia's migrant communities over two decades. In particular, the analysis addresses four core questions central to understanding how migration has shaped the country between 1996 and 2016. By comparing European and Asian migrant groups, examining age-related patterns, and assessing settlement behaviour across states, this dashboard delivers a more intensive aspect of migration, in order to deliver a comprehensive story.
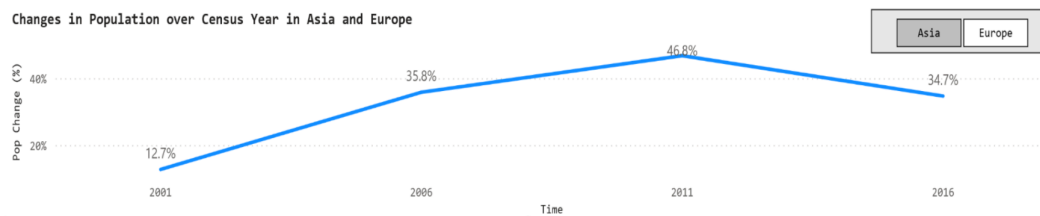
4.1 Regional Growth Patterns: Asia vs. Europe

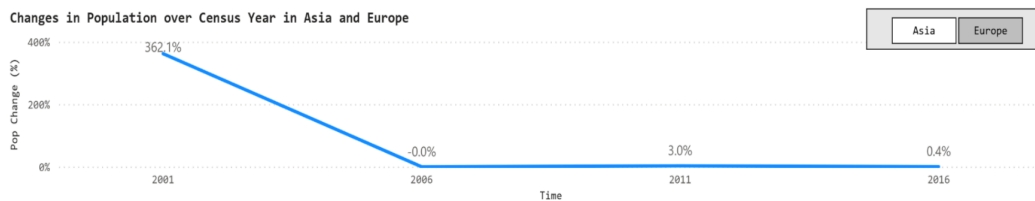
Figure 4.1 - Population Growth Rate over Census Year in Asia

Figure 4.2 - Population Growth Rate over Census Year in Europe

Country.of.birth	2001	2006	2011	2016	**Total**
India	21.8%	72.9%	98.4%	45.2%	**45.2%**
China (excludes SARs and Taiwan)	29.2%	64.3%	53.7%	44.0%	**44.0%**
Philippines	9.0%	24.1%	36.0%	30.9%	**30.9%**
Vietnam	3.0%	8.8%	16.6%	17.2%	**17.2%**
South Africa	40.6%	37.5%	35.3%	11.7%	**11.7%**
Australia	6.0%	4.0%	5.8%	5.9%	**5.9%**
Total	**12.7%**	**5.2%**	**8.2%**	**7.3%**	**7.3%**

Country.of.birth	2001	2006	2011	2016	**Total**
South Africa	40.6%	37.5%	35.3%	11.7%	**11.7%**
Australia	6.0%	4.0%	5.8%	5.9%	**5.9%**
New Zealand	24.8%	12.4%	24.2%	4.4%	**4.4%**
Lebanon	2.8%	7.7%	4.7%	4.1%	**4.1%**
England		1.3%	5.5%	1.1%	**1.1%**
Italy	-8.2%	-5.1%	-7.5%	-3.0%	**-3.0%**
Total	**12.7%**	**5.2%**	**8.2%**	**7.3%**	**7.3%**

Figure 4.3 - Population Growth Rate over Census Year among COBs (Table)

Overall, the population growth rate of Asian-born migrants was significantly higher than that of European-born migrants over the observed period. In the last three census years, the growth rate for Asian-born groups consistently exceeded 30 percent, while European-born populations remained relatively stable, showing minimal change across the same timeframe (*Figure 4.1* and *Figure 4.2*). In comparison between the growth rate of European countries (represented by

England and Italy) and Asian countries (China, India, Lebanon, Philippines and Vietnam), the data reveals that migration groups from Asia, particularly in India and China, have grown significantly (at 45.2% and 44.0% in total) compared to those from Europe *(Figure 4.3).* Due to Hugo (2008), the increase in migrates from the mentioned Asian countries can be attributed to the skilled labour inflow due to the need of support in manufacturing. Furthermore, refugee and humanitarian movement during the period between 1976 and 2012 also contributed a lot to the Australian population (SBS News, 2013). These patterns suggest that contemporary migration is more strongly shaped by labour market needs and educational opportunities than by historical links, which traditionally drove European migration.

4.2 Age Structure: Comparing Overseas-Born and Australian-Born Populations
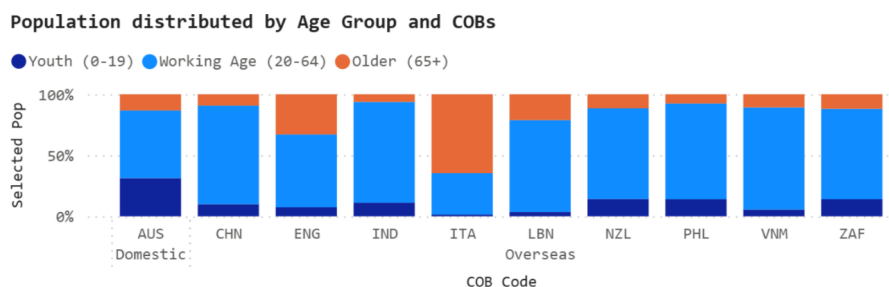

Figure 4.4 - Population distributed by Age Group and COBs

The age composition of the population across different countries of birth shows a clear distinction between Australian-born individuals and overseas-born migrant groups. Among **Australian-born residents,** the population was more evenly distributed across age groups, with a notable presence in the youth (0–19) and working-age (20–64) categories. This reflects the natural generational renewal of the domestic population.

In contrast, most **overseas-born groups** are characterised by a dominant working-age population. Migrants from China, India, the Philippines, Vietnam, and South Africa showed a strong concentration in the 20–64 age group, exceeding 70%. These patterns align with Australia's skilled migration intake and international education pathways mentioned above, which primarily attract younger, economically active individuals. The small youth population within these groups suggests that overseas-born residents are often **entering the country as adults rather than as children.**

In stark contrast, migrants from **Italy and England** show an inverse profile. Both groups display significantly higher proportions in the older age category (65+). This indicates the long appearance of these communities as many of them arrived during earlier migration waves in the post-war period (Walsh, 2012). These findings are consistent with broader trends of an ageing European-born migrant population.

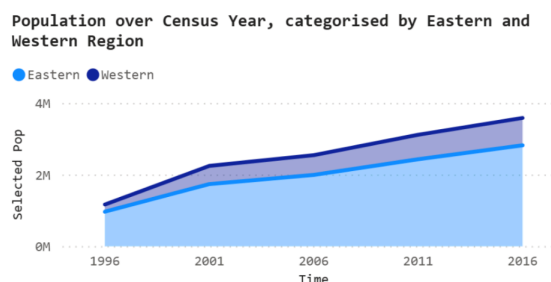## 4.3 Historical Settlement Preferences in Western Australia and South Australia

Figure 4.5 - Population over Census Year, categorised by Easter and Western Region
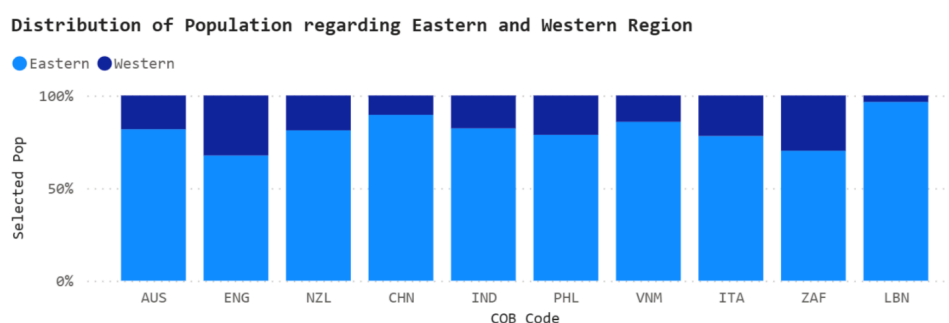

Figure 4.6 - Distribution of Population regarding Eastern and Western Region

Geographic settlement trends reveal further insights. *Figure 4.5* shows that while both eastern and western regions experienced growth between 1996 and 2016, eastern states (including NSW, VIC, and QLD) experienced the majority of migrant population increases. By 2016, the eastern region had more than 78% of the total selected migrant population, reinforcing its role as the dominant destination for migration.

The bar chart further breaks this down by country of birth, confirming that all ten COBs display a clear eastern-state preference, along with varying degrees of regional distribution , reflecting the popularity of Sydney and Melbourne as migration entry points due to employment, education, and cultural hubs *(Figure 4.6).* As a result, this has raised strategic considerations for managing growth in migration towards metropolitan regions by shifting it towards regional areas.

5. Conclusion

This report has analysed demographic changes in Australia between 1996 and 2016, focusing on ten key countries of birth. Across all dashboards, the findings confirm that migration has become a defining factor in shaping Australia's population profile, contributing not only to growth but also to shifts in age structure and settlement patterns.

Migrant groups from Asia, particularly India, China, the Philippines, and Vietnam, have driven the most significant increases, largely due to skilled migration and international education pathways. These populations are predominantly of working age, strengthening Australia's labour force and helping to offset population ageing. In contrast, migrants from England and Italy reflect earlier migration waves and now show much older age profiles, highlighting a growing need for aged care planning among established communities.

Geographically, there has been a clear shift toward eastern state settlement, especially in New South Wales and Victoria. While earlier arrivals from countries like South Africa and New Zealand were more evenly distributed, most recent migrants now settle in urban centres. This trend reflects the concentration of economic opportunity, infrastructure, and social support in major cities.

The patterns observed in this report underscore the need for responsive policy in infrastructure, healthcare, and workforce development. Migration continues to support both economic resilience and demographic balance. A clear understanding of where and how these population shifts occur is essential for planning future services and ensuring that national strategies remain inclusive and sustainable.

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