Reference No. 21

Summarising: Biddle & Hunter (2005), *Factors associated with internal migration: A comparison between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians*
Responsibility for the preparation of this research summary rests with the authors of the MCEETYA report *Education, Training and Indigenous Futures: CAEPR Policy Research 1990–2007* and not the original author(s) of the summarised material.

Title of Research:
Factors associated with internal migration: A comparison between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians

Research Publication:
CAEPR Working Paper No. 32/2005

Name of Researcher(s):
N. Biddle and B.H. Hunter

Time period:
2001

Geographic location:
Australia-wide

Methodology:
An analysis of the 2001 Census, with specific reference to responses to questions dealing with place of residence one and five years earlier, and aggregated at the (former) ATSIC regional level.

Aims:
The paper examines the patterns of internal migration by Indigenous people and identifies factors associated with both the decision to move and choice of destination, to inform policies designed to encourage Indigenous people to move to areas of higher employment prospects.

Selected findings and insights:
Between 1996-2001 and between 2000-2001, the direction of migration was generally similar across the two periods:

- Bourke (NSW), Sydney (NSW), Mount Isa (Qld.), the Torres Strait Area and Tennant Creek (NT) all experienced a large net loss in Indigenous usual residents, with Ballarat (Vic), Brisbane (Qld.), Perth (WA) and Darwin (NT) experiencing a large net gain.

- With the exception of Sydney, Indigenous people tended to have higher (and positive) net migration into major metropolitan areas. Sydney had a negative net internal migration rate despite having a buoyant, international labour market, perhaps because of exceptionally high housing costs.

- In regional and remote Australia, where the net migration rates tended to be negative, Indigenous people were less likely to move away than other Australians. This may be an indication of a greater cultural connection with their customary land.

In addition, other CAEPR research has shown that there is a large degree of circular migration—that is, moving back and forth between different areas over an extended period of time— for the Indigenous population.
Factors associated with moving can be summarised as follows:

- The Indigenous population had a much higher probability of moving throughout their children’s years of schooling than the non-Indigenous population, possibly due to a relatively low engagement with formal schooling as well as being the cause of lower attendance and higher truancy.

- Having a higher proportion of the population who were Indigenous leads to an increase in the probability of moving for non-Indigenous Australians, but a decrease for Indigenous Australians, emphasising the social costs of moving being higher for Indigenous people in these areas.

- Indigenous Australians, as in the case of non-Indigenous Australians, living in high unemployment areas were more likely to make the decision to migrate than those living in low areas of unemployment. However the destination did not appear to be influenced by its Indigenous employment rate.

The paper concludes that:

Even if Indigenous people migrated to more developed labour markets in major urban areas, there appear to be few employment opportunities awaiting for them there, with the difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous employment probabilities being similar in both metropolitan and remote areas. Within metropolitan areas, Indigenous people tend to live in disadvantaged suburbs with relatively high unemployment rates.

Educational implications

The major educational implication of this paper is that it draws attention to the difficulties faced by education authorities in responding to high migration rates of school-aged children and adolescents and planning adequate service provision. In fact, as the paper points out, circular migration involving shorter-term migration is also significant. Taken together both forms of migration can have quite a disruptive effect on student learning and present schools with particular curriculum and teaching challenges. For example, curriculum consistency may become an issue as might student engagement due to prior learning deficiencies or other social or health related matters. [planning] [curriculum]

Relevance:

Introductory Topic: The Changing Demography of Indigenous Australia

Related papers:

This paper also appeared in Australian Journal of Labour Economics Vol. 9, No. 4 December 2006, pp. 321 – 341.
Figure: Most common destination of those who migrate and percentage change in population since 5 years ago – Indigenous persons, 2001