

SUMMARY

Australia's Recent Skilled Migration Policy: Relationship between Migrant Selection and Actual Employment

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A recent phenomenon of globalization is the movement of people across international borders on a massive scale. In particular, the increase of so-called “skilled migrants” is a rather new phenomenon especially compared to family migration and refugee movement.

In Australia, following a change to the Howard coalition government in 1996, the migration policy emphasized “skilled migrants”, and as a result started to accept them in large numbers. At the same time, the selection criteria for such migrants was modified in order to attempt to select the most employable migrants in the labor market using a “point test”.

Skilled migration has become the center of Australia’s migration policy since 1996, as the number of skilled migrants has become more than half the total number of migrants. This policy has continued under the Labor Government since 2007. Therefore, it is clear that skilled migration is now the main pillar of Australia’s migration policy regardless of the political party in charge of government.

However, as the selection of migrants as “skilled” does not guarantee their actual employment in Australia’s labor market, the relationship between “selection” and “employment” is one of the most notable policy challenges in the skilled migration policy. The Howard government tried to maximize skilled migrants’ employability by using a “point test”, particularly following the temporary downturn of the economy after the Global Financial Crisis. This test was continued under the Labor Government who instituted an “employer sponsored” approach. While the migrants who passed the point test have no guarantee of a job offer and this resulted in employment in the unskilled sector, employer sponsored migrants are expected to take employment under the sponsoring employer. The Labor Government deliberately shifted emphasis to the employer sponsored approach in the skilled migration policy, which limited the chances of application for those not sponsored.

This suggests that the nature of skilled migration policy involves the relationship between “selection” and “employment”. The skilled migrants are expected to contribute to the host country by “working”, but their employment is not guaranteed in the selection process even though it tries to maximize their chances. The Australian Government has been trying to meet this challenge over the last fifteen years.