

# Concerns on immigration continue to linger

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MORE than one-third of Australians think immigration levels are too high.

The research, by Monash University's Institute for the Study of Global Movements, points to lingering worries about immigration and race issues in Australia, despite decades of rapid demographic and cultural growth and increased government emphasis on migration to ease the skills shortage. The findings come after the Federal Government's recent decision to raise the skilled migration quota by 6000 this year, taking the number of skilled migrant visas to 108,500 by 2007-08.

But this environment of diversity has not eradicated concerns about immigration among the general population.

Overall, 35% of the 2000 people surveyed — most of whom were Australian citizens — believed the current immigration intake was too high. "Long-time" Australians, those born in Australia to Australian-born parents, tended to have the most negative views towards immigration issues, and about 23% believed the range of accepted migrant countries was too broad. Migrants from Britain and Europe were preferred over those from the Middle East, Asia and Muslim countries.

But while the anti-immigration sentiment was spread across one-third of the population, this represented a decline over the decade.

Similar studies asking the same questions found that in 1996 about 70% of people believed the immigration levels in Australia were too high.

Monash University's Professor Andrew Markus said with a prosperous economy and low unemployment, a more positive mood tended to prevail.

And the fact that intolerance was subsiding meant the time was ripe for the Federal Government to act.

"We can clearly identify from this survey that there's misunderstanding, there's divergences in experiences of discrimination and so on. So it's not hard to say that there are things that could be done," he said.

The research is part of a Scanlon Foundation-funded project on social cohesion.

Despite the tremors surrounding immigration policy, researchers found that people's connection to Australia and sense of belonging was high. People were optimistic about their futures and the lives of their children, none more so than those from non-English-speaking backgrounds.

And, in an example of the complexities of social attitudes, 69% of people agreed with the statement: "Immigration makes Australia stronger."

Among those who did not support the Government's immigration policies, the research found that trades people and those aged over 54 were least supportive.

*This story was found at: <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2008/04/21/1208742852711.html>*