



Australian Government
Department of Immigration and Citizenship

The Census in a Multicultural Australia

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Introduction

Distinguished guests; ladies and gentlemen. I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we are gathered today, the Wurundjerri people.

I consider myself fortunate to be working in multicultural affairs, where we celebrate the cultural diversity of Australia every day.

I have been working in the field for some time, both in my current role as a public servant, and in the non-government sector where I previously worked as the Director of the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia.

In my experience, I have seen that Australia has benefited from the contributions of many migrants from around the world who have made Australia home and helped shape our unique national identity.

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In fact, about one in four people in Australia was born overseas and some 45 per cent of all Australians were born overseas or have at least one parent who was born overseas, including myself.

Our more than 22 million people:

- speak more than 260 languages, including Australian Indigenous languages,
- identify with 270 ancestries, and
- observe a wide variety of cultural and religious traditions.

Since 1945, we have accepted over 7 million migrants under our nation-building migration program, which has transformed our society and economy for the better. In less than a lifetime, Australia has changed from being a primarily Anglo-Celtic society of fewer than eight million to a multicultural society of more than 22 million.

The composition of our immigration program has also changed fundamentally. While Australia's large post war migration program was sourced mostly from European countries, in recent times only 22 per cent of Australia's new arrivals are from Europe.

In more recent times, temporary migrants have also become a more prominent component of Australia's immigration program. This presents both new opportunities and new challenges, as seen with our large international student population.

On the whole, migration has made Australia a more cosmopolitan, outward looking and dynamic society. Nearly 87 per cent of Australians think it is a good thing for society to be made up of different cultures.

As you can see from all the statistics I have just rattled off, statistics enable us to illustrate the cultural diversity of Australia, which in turn helps to promote messages of national unity and community harmony.

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Multicultural Policy

I would like to briefly touch on the Australian Government's new multicultural policy, *The People of Australia*. While it is not the purpose of my attendance here today, the new policy is an important step taken by the Australian Government in embracing Australia's cultural diversity.

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The Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, the Hon Chris Bowen MP, launched the new policy on 16 February 2011.

Working across whole-of-government, my branch supported the development of the new policy, and I am very proud to say that it encapsulates everything it should.

The People of Australia is a policy for all Australians. It is available online and I would encourage you all to read it.

The policy states that 'Australia's multicultural composition is at the heart of our national identity and is intrinsic to our history and character'. The policy includes reference to fairness, inclusion, respect and the rights and responsibilities of all Australians. Importantly, it states that multiculturalism is 'about all Australians and for all Australians'.

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I have summarised on the slide here, the four key principles for the Australian Government that have been enshrined in the policy. The principles commit the Australian Government to:

- celebrating cultural diversity,
- building an inclusive and participative society,
- welcoming the economic benefits arising from multiculturalism, and
- promoting understanding and acceptance while responding with strength to expressions of intolerance and discrimination.

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The policy also encompasses the shared rights and responsibilities of all Australians relating to our successful multicultural nation. These rights and responsibilities are

enshrined in our citizenship pledge which requires future citizens to pledge their loyalty to Australia and its people, uphold our laws and democracy and respect our rights and liberties.

These rights and liberties include Australians of all backgrounds being entitled to celebrate, practise and maintain their cultural heritage, traditions and language within the law and free from discrimination.

In launching the new policy, Minister Bowen said that three elements—respect for Australian values, citizenship-centric multiculturalism, and bipartisan political support—combine uniquely in the Australian context to define what he termed ‘the genius of Australian multiculturalism’.

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There are also a number of key initiatives outlined in the policy, which are very exciting and exhibit the government’s commitment to really making some changes in the way we approach multiculturalism in Australia. Importantly, the government will establish a new independent body, the Australian Multicultural Council (AMC), to replace the previous Australian Multicultural Advisory Council (AMAC).

The new council will be quite different because it will be an independently selected body that will advise on policies and emerging issues to inform our multicultural strategy. There will be a merit-based selection process for the new AMC, which will provide for a more independent and non-partisan framework for the appointment of AMC members.

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Understanding our communities

I don’t think anyone could argue against the need for the Australian Government to have a good understanding of Australia’s diverse communities. In multicultural affairs, we endeavour to understand the composition of Australian society and the composition of individual cultural groups, for a number of reasons.

Firstly, it helps us to develop informed policies and programs relating to multicultural affairs. For instance, alongside other data sources, the Census data assists us in pinpointing areas of high diversity and areas where new arrivals are settling, so that we can target settlement and other assistance where it is needed most.

Secondly, understanding Australia's diverse communities helps inform other government agencies about communities when they are developing policies and programs around social inclusion, access and equity, and other related fields. This can even extend to assisting other agencies in developing communication strategies for disaster recovery or in times of emergency both in Australia and overseas.

Thirdly, our understanding of communities helps us to advise our political leaders and diplomats about communities, so they can respond to a range of public or diplomatic issues.

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Australian society

I would like to talk to you now about what we at DIAC know about Australia's diverse communities; how we learn it; and the role the census has in this process. Here is a quick rundown on the makeup of Australian society in terms of cultural identity.

Our largest communities, based on the responses to the 2006 Census' ancestry question were: Australian, English, Irish, Scottish, Italian, German and Chinese. We could assume that the majority of people citing Australian as their ancestry are of Anglo-Celtic background.

There is no perfect way to estimate the size of ethnic or cultural communities. One of our preferred methods is to look at responses to the 2006 census ancestry question, which was '*what is the person's ancestry?*'

Up to two responses were permitted for each person, which means that the number of ancestry responses is much greater than the population.

There were nearly 25.5 million ancestry responses, compared with the actual number of people counted in the 2006 Census, which was just over 20 million, indicating that a fair percentage of the population has mixed heritage.

Individual communities

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The Italian Australian community is a good example of a community where ancestry responses are very important.

There were 852 421 Italian ancestry responses in the 2006 Census, which means that about 4.3 per cent of Australians claim Italian ancestry.

Of this number, 610 341 respondents were born in Australia, compared with 190 142 born in Italy.

Comparatively, only 199 120 Australians were born in Italy, which was nine per cent fewer than at the time of the 2001 Census. This number is higher for Italian Australians born in Italy as it also includes 2280 people who claimed English ancestry and 6090 who did not state their ancestry.

If we only used country of birth responses, we would perceive the community to be decreasing in size, which it is not. There was an increase in Italian ancestry responses between the 2001 and 2006 Censuses of around nine per cent.

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Australia has a large Greek community, and the highest number of these live in Melbourne. It has often been stated that the Greek community in Melbourne is the largest Greek community outside of Greece.

I do not have the data to corroborate this, because I haven't investigated the size of the Greek communities elsewhere around the world. One thing is for sure though, and that is that Australia's and Melbourne's Greek communities are flourishing.

As you can see, 42 per cent of the 365 000 Australians claiming Greek ancestry reside in Victoria. No longer a 'migrant' community, the Greek community, as with many other communities, is part and parcel of our multicultural Australia.

Sixty-four per cent of the people claiming Greek ancestry in the 2006 census were Australian-born. Most of the migration from Greece occurred post-war, and at the time of the 1971 Census, we had a 160 000 strong community of Greek migrants.

As there has been a decline in Greek migration to Australia in the past few decades, the Greek community today consists mainly of the original post-war migrants and their descendants. Data on this community is important for the health and ageing sectors, as they strive to provide culturally appropriate care for ageing post-war migrants. This is a theme echoed within many communities that grew with post-war migration.

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Getting back to looking at the difference between country of birth and ancestry data, I would like to look at the case of the Armenian community. If we only consider country of birth data for the Armenian community, it would seem the figure is 975.

If we look at those who claim Armenian ancestry, however, the number rises to 15 789, a far more accurate reflection of the community size. More than a third were born in Australia (5831), followed by Iran (1540), Egypt (1359), Lebanon (1333), Turkey (1022), Syria (869) and Armenia (832), with smaller numbers in other countries.

However, the Armenian National Committee claims a higher number than this, some 50 000.¹ This is a much larger figure than the 2006 Census data on country of birth or ancestry indicates. Officially, we can only go by census data so it is very important that communities respond to the ancestry question accurately. My department is supporting the ABS with its strategy to ensure accurate counting of Australia's culturally diverse communities in the 2011 Census.

¹ Armenian National Committee website, <http://anc.org.au/page.php?8>

The other message that the Armenian example illustrates is that country of birth statistics can become meaningless in some cases, where ancestry is the main determinant of a community.

It is also worth noting that only applying country of birth statistics means that we miss out on counting communities that are not defined by a country at all, such as Assyrian, Chaldean and Kurdish as well as the various Thai and Burmese communities, and many others.

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Religion is a demographic indicator of some importance when we are managing policies and programs relating to multiculturalism. Interfaith activities are one of the areas we focus on in promoting harmony in Australia.

I think it pertinent therefore, to just briefly reflect on the composition of Australia in terms of our belief systems. In the census, the questions on religion are optional, so this chart provides the responses including the 'not stated' category, which is quite high, at just more than 11 per cent.

There are many reasons that people may choose not to respond to this question. Some are simply exercising their individual right to protect personal information, while some have suffered persecution due to their faith making them wary of sharing it in the census.

As you can see, the Buddhist faith is the largest non-Christian faith reported, at nearly 420 000 or 2.1 per cent. Islam is the next largest, at just over 340 000 or 1.7 per cent of the Australian population.

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Another good measure of the size of a community is language spoken at home. We can see here that Italian and Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese) again feature prominently, as they did with ancestry responses. It is interesting that if we combine

Mandarin and Cantonese, Chinese then overtakes Italian as the most widely spoken language.

This is an indicator of recent migration patterns, both permanent migration and the increasing numbers of visiting international students from mainland China. In fact, Cantonese-speakers grew by only 8.5 per cent, while Mandarin-speakers grew by 58.4 per cent between 2001 and 2006.

German and Dutch on the other hand do not show up here, while Greek, Arabic, Vietnamese and Spanish do. At the time of the 2006 Census, there were some 811 543 Australians who claimed German ancestry while there were only 75 635 German-speakers. There were 310 082 Australians who claimed Dutch ancestry while there were only 36 183 Dutch-speakers.

Most German Australians and Dutch Australians are now second or later generation Australian. The decline in language ability can be attributed to past policies which encouraged quick assimilation. Today, foreign language ability is encouraged in a globalised economy, and the Australian Government embraces a multicultural, multilingual Australia.

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Once we agree on a measure of the size of the community (most commonly, ancestry), we then look at other variables to understand the individual community more deeply. Some of these variables are noted on this slide.

Variables such as the country of birth or ancestry of a spouse, citizenship rates, and educational and employment characteristics, can provide us with a sense of how well a community is settling in Australia.

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For some of our newer communities, particularly those that are largely arriving under the humanitarian program, we are looking to the 2011 Census to provide some information on where they are settling and some detail on their demographics. This data will help inform our settlement programs.

For example, if we look at the Burmese community, we currently use a combination of 2006 Census data and data we collect from new permanent arrivals to Australia. For new arrivals, we are able to look at factors including country of birth, intended place of residence, English proficiency and religion.

Some of the questions on arrival, such as religion and intended place of residence are optional, so we cannot always rely on the data as being representative of all new arrivals. In the case of the Burmese community, we can see that at the time of the 2006 Census, there were 12 378 people in Australia who were born in Burma.

As this is a relatively recent community in Australia, the ancestry responses were not much more, at 13 821. An estimated 75 per cent of the Burma-born community at the time of the 2006 Census were Anglo-Burmese, many of whom left Burma following Burmese independence in 1948. We know that in recent times, Australia has received a number of Burmese under the Humanitarian Program.

To ascertain an accurate picture of the Burmese community in Australia, we need to use census data coupled with the data we collect on arrival. Our internal data shows that between the 2006 Census, and 31 December 2010, there were 8847 permanent arrivals from Burma. This means the Burmese community in Australia has increased by 42 per cent in just over four years.

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At the department, we have developed 100 Community Information Summaries which can be found on our website. They provide a snapshot of data from the 2006 Census relating to each community, using many of these variables. They are each around four pages long. The first two pages of the India-born Community Information Summary are displayed here to give you a sense of the style of the documents.

To date, we have only counted communities according to country of birth data in the Community Information Summaries. In future, it may be possible for us to build on this work and provide some ancestry-based data as well.

Alongside ‘country of birth of parents’ data, this could potentially enable us to make some comparisons across generations. We may be able to get some sense of whether second and third generations are more or less successful than their parents in terms of educational qualifications and employment outcomes.

Australian Societal Trends

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Another way of using census data in understanding Australian society, is to look at societal trends over time. We can map the changes in the makeup of Australian society over time using census data over the decades.

As a customer of ABS data, we do not always need to draw the data from the census or other data sources ourselves. Here is a graphical representation of the percentage of Australians born in various regions of the world, between 1998 and 2008. This data was directly sourced from an ABS publication on population indicators in 2010.

As you can see, the major trend illustrated here is that the percentage of Australians who were born in the United Kingdom or Europe has been gradually decreasing, while the percentage of Australians born in Asia has been gradually increasing.

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Using the census data, we can also compare the largest communities by ancestry between 1986 and 2006. The ancestry question in 1986 was slightly different to the question in 2006.

In 1986, the Census asked ‘What is each person’s ancestry?’ and then gave possible examples as Greek, English, Indian, Armenian, Aboriginal or Chinese. The guidelines in 1986 advised householders that it was ‘quite acceptable to base [their] answer on [their] grandparents’ ancestry’.

In 2006, the question was almost identical, but the guidelines instead stated ‘consider the origins of the person’s parents and grandparents for example’.

This differentiation between the guidelines provided in 1986 and 2006 may have resulted in some discrepancies between the results, as people responding in 1986 may have been more inclined to report their ancestry to three generations, rather than two.

There was a fascinating shift in responses of 'Australian' and responses of 'English'. The percentage of people responding as having Australian ancestry increased dramatically from 21.8 to 37.1 per cent. Simultaneously, the percentage of people responding as having English ancestry reduced from 42.3 to 31.6 per cent. I won't speculate on this shift at this time, other than to say you could probably write a thesis on it.

Other shifts are evident too. There were increases in the percentage of people claiming Irish, Scottish, Italian, German, Chinese, Lebanese, Indian, Vietnamese, Polish, New Zealander and Filipino ancestries. There were decreases in responses of Greek and Maltese.

Overall, it is evident that although there has been a general trend to an increase in Australians born in Asian countries, and a decrease in Australians born in European countries, there has been very little corresponding impact on the top 15 ancestry responses.

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To conclude, I would like to acknowledge and thank the Australian Bureau of Statistics for the opportunity to speak at the 2011 Conference. I look forward to the data from the 2011 Census, which will greatly assist us in improving the information that we in the department currently have on our diverse communities.

The Department of Immigration and Citizenship will continue to encourage the participation of all people in the 2011 Census, to enable us to improve our understanding of and support for Australia's diverse communities.

Thank you.