

# Cultural diversity overview



In 2006, 44% of Australians were either born overseas or had at least one overseas-born parent.

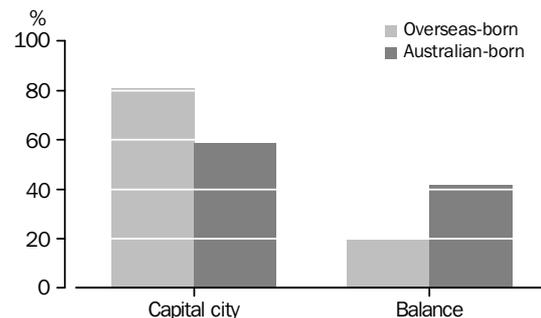
Almost a quarter of Australia's population was born overseas. With people from over 200 countries<sup>1</sup>, Australia has a diverse mix of cultures. The population's diversity provides a rich variety of Indigenous and non-Indigenous languages, religions, beliefs, traditions, and activities.

As with the population itself, this diversity tends to be concentrated in capital cities. Migrants are drawn to Australia's urbanised areas: the 2006 Census showed four fifths of Australia's overseas-born population lived in capital cities, compared with three fifths of people born in Australia. Australia's Indigenous population was distributed differently, with less than one third living in capital cities.

Other cultural indicators further highlight the contrast between Australia's urban and rural residents. In 2006, 90% of people affiliated with a non-Christian religion lived in a capital city. Similarly, 88% of people who spoke a language other than English at home also lived in a capital city. Of the capital cities, Sydney and Perth had the highest proportions of overseas-born residents—over one third each. Hobart had the lowest proportion of overseas-born Australians (13%).

This chapter describes the ethnic and cultural dimensions of the Australian population and the social characteristics of particular migrant and ancestry groups. Australia's Indigenous population, which contributes significantly to the country's cultural diversity, is not closely analysed in this chapter.

## Country of birth, capital city and non-capital city balance



## First Australians

In 2006, 2.4% of the population (or 455,000 people) were Indigenous Australians. Of these, 89.6% were Aboriginal, 6.5% were Torres Strait Islander and 3.9% were both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. Further analysis of census data relating to Indigenous peoples in Australia can be found in: *Population Characteristics, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2006*, ABS cat. no. 4713.0.

## Asians younger, but more Europeans

Australia has many migratory links with the rest of the world. At the time of the 2006 Census, Australia was home to 4.4 million overseas-born people, making up one quarter of all Australian residents. A further one fifth of the population had at least one parent born overseas.

Almost three quarters of the overseas-born population were born either in Europe (accounting for 47%, or 2.1 million) or Asia<sup>2</sup> (27%, or 1.2 million). Half of those people born in Europe were from the United Kingdom, making it the most common birthplace (accounting for 24% of the total overseas-born population). New Zealand, the next most common country of birth,

accounted for 9% of the overseas-born population, followed by China and Italy (around 5% each).

Significant differences in the age profiles of birthplace groups are linked to historical migration policies and migratory patterns. There is a clear link between time spent in Australia and the median age of the groups. While the median age of those born in European countries was 56 years, for those born in Asian countries it was 37 years.

Among the top 10 countries of birth, people born in Italy were the oldest, with half of this group (or 98,000 people) aged 66 or over, and people born in India were the youngest (half aged 35 or younger). Differences in the age profiles of birthplace groups help to explain variations in their socioeconomic status, in terms of labour force participation rates, unemployment rates and educational attainment. Such characteristics are themselves associated with age.

Within some birthplace groups there are large differences in the number of men and women living in Australia. The groups with the fewest men relative to women<sup>3</sup> included Japan, (with a sex ratio of 51—that is, 51 Japanese-born men for every 100 Japanese-born women in Australia), Thailand (52), and the Philippines (55). Birthplace groups with the highest sex ratios in Australia were Bangladesh (154), Pakistan (134), and India (123).

The overseas-born population in Australia is increasing in number as well as diversity. Between 1996 and 2006, it grew by 13% (from 3.9 million to 4.4 million people) and featured a major increase in Asian immigration. In 2006, over half (52%) of all longer-standing migrants

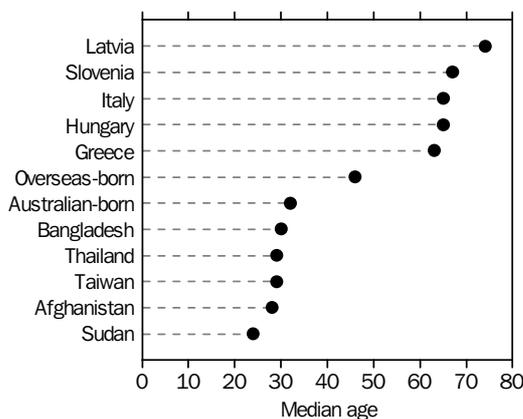
In 2006, 25% of the Asian-born population had arrived after 2001, compared with only 7% of the European-born population.

were born in Europe, compared to only 22% of the recently arrived population. Conversely, Asian-born people represented only 24% of longer-standing migrants, but accounted for 44% of all recent arrivals.

Country of birth groups which increased the most between 1996 and 2006 were New Zealand (by around 98,000 people), China (96,000) and India (70,000). In contrast, European country of birth groups declined sharply over the same period—Italy by 39,000 people, United Kingdom by 35,000, and Greece by 17,000. In fact, since 1996, the 10 countries of birth which reduced the most in number were all European countries. These population decreases can be attributed to deaths, and low current migration levels replenishing the group.

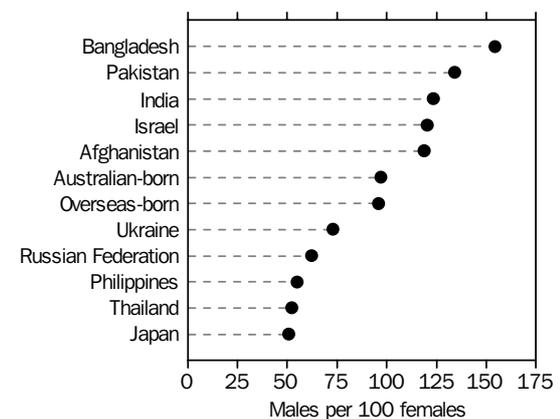
Over time, the changing focus of Australia's migration program has caused fluctuations in the number of arrivals born in particular countries. However, the contrast between recent and longer-standing migrants extends beyond birthplace. There are clear differences in ancestry, religious affiliation, and proficiency in spoken English, as well as age distribution, employment status and income.

**Countries of birth with oldest and youngest populations(a)**



(a) Populations with more than 5,000 people.

**Countries of birth with highest and lowest sex ratios(a)**



(a) Populations with more than 5,000 people.

### How the census measures cultural background

The 2006 Census asked several questions which helped to provide a picture of Australia's cultural profile. A key question asked was the individual's country of birth. For those born overseas, their year of arrival in Australia was also collected, and their country of birth provides a useful indication of a person's likely ethnic or cultural background.

However, for some overseas-born people their country of birth may be different from their ethnicity, such as people of Chinese ethnicity born in Malaysia, or people of Indian ethnicity born in England. Furthermore, for Australian-born residents, additional information is needed to uncover their diverse ethnic or cultural backgrounds, arising from their parents' or grandparents' migration to Australia. The census therefore asked people to identify their two main 'ancestries', that is; the ethnic or country groups from which their parents or grandparents came. It also asked people to specify whether or not they were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

The census also asked which language people spoke at home, and the religion they were affiliated with. Taken together, the data on country of birth, ancestry, language and religion provide a useful picture of Australia's cultural diversity.

### Top 10 countries of birth, selected characteristics

Country of birth	Persons '000	Proportion of overseas-born %	Median age years	Sex ratio(a)
United Kingdom	1 038.2	23.5	53.7	100.6
New Zealand	389.5	8.8	39.5	101.8
China(b)	206.6	4.7	39.2	82.3
Italy	199.1	4.5	65.7	107.2
Viet Nam	159.9	3.6	41.0	89.0
India	147.1	3.3	35.8	123.2
Philippines	120.5	2.7	40.4	54.8
Greece	110.0	2.5	63.3	98.3
Germany	106.5	2.4	59.2	91.8
South Africa	104.1	2.4	38.4	96.1
Born elsewhere overseas	1 834.6	41.5	44.0	95.1
<b>Total overseas-born</b>	<b>4 416.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>46.8</b>	<b>96.0</b>

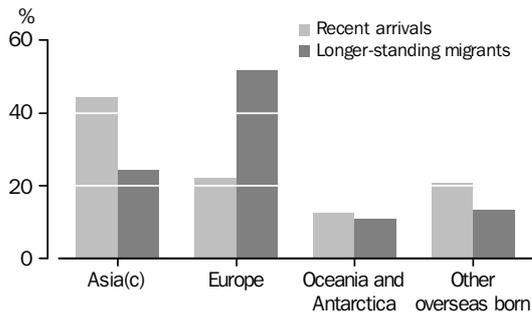
(a) Number of males per 100 females.  
 (b) Excludes Special Administrative Regions and Taiwan Province.

### European arrivals down despite United Kingdom dominance

Of people who arrived in Australia between 2002 and 2006, 6 of the 10 most common birthplaces were Asian countries. Nevertheless, the United Kingdom was the main source of recent arrivals, supplying 14% of all recent arrivals (or 92,000 people), followed by New Zealand (10% or 68,000 people).

The large size of these groups in Australia reflects the constant inflow of United Kingdom and New Zealand-born arrivals over time: recent arrivals accounted for only 9% of the total United Kingdom-born population in Australia, and 18% of the New Zealand-born population. In contrast, the migration pattern for the Asian-born population has shown a more recent surge in arrivals. The next two largest recent arrival groups, the Chinese and Indian-born, accounted for 32% and 38% of their respective population groups in Australia.

**Region of birthplace, recent(a) and longer-standing(b) overseas-born arrivals**



(a) Arrived between 2002 and 2006.

(b) Arrived before 2002.

(c) Comprises North-East Asia, South-East Asia and Southern and Central Asia.

Australia's Humanitarian Program enables entry into the country for people who are subject to persecution or discrimination amounting to gross violation of human rights and needing resettlement. A number of Australia's recent arrivals were born in countries affected by war and political unrest. Over 73% (or around 13,000) of Australian residents born in Sudan arrived in 2002 or later. Similarly, a high proportion of those born in Zimbabwe (42% or 8,000), Afghanistan (36% or 6,000), and Iraq (29%, or 9,000) arrived in 2002 or later.

Many large birthplace groups in Australia consist almost entirely of longer-standing migrants. These groups came in response to Australia's migration program which, following the Second World War, sought to rapidly expand the country's population.

Most respondents to the 2006 Census who arrived in Australia between 1950 and 1970 were born in Europe (87%). In fact, this was the period when most (53%) of the European-

**Recent arrivals** are people who migrated to Australia in the 5 years before the 2006 Census, ie. 2002 to 2006 inclusive.

**Longer-standing migrants** are people who migrated to Australia before 2002.

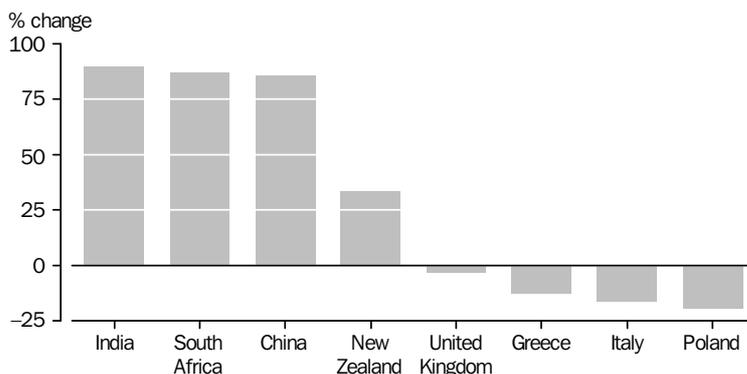
born population arrived (excluding those born in the UK). The countries of birth with the highest proportions of longer-standing migrants were Italy, Greece and Malta, with around 99% of their populations having arrived in Australia before 2002. The people from these, and other European countries, brought different languages, customs and experiences which are now established in many communities across Australia.

**More working age recent arrivals**

Overall, recent arrivals are younger than both longer-standing migrants, and the Australian-born population (see Age and sex distribution graphs on p. 38). In 2006, people aged 20–39 accounted for over half of all recent arrivals (54%), but only 23% of longer-standing migrants, and 28% of the Australian-born population.

The age profiles of Australia's recent and longer-term arrival groups both differ by country of birth. For example, over a quarter of the recent arrivals born in the United Kingdom, South Africa and New Zealand were aged under 15, compared with only 6.6% of the recently arrived Chinese-born population. These differences reflect the variety of reasons associated with moving to Australia.

**Population change for selected countries of birth, 1996–2006**



Selected countries of birth of recent arrivals and longer-standing migrants

Country of birth	Recent arrivals		Longer-standing migrants	
	'000	%	'000	%
United Kingdom	92.4	14.2	896.6	25.2
New Zealand	67.7	10.4	298.7	8.4
China	62.0	9.5	134.3	3.8
India	54.1	8.3	87.6	2.5
South Africa	26.3	4.0	74.5	2.1
Malaysia	20.5	3.2	68.3	1.9
Philippines	20.1	3.1	95.5	2.7
Korea, Republic of (South)	18.3	2.8	29.5	0.8
United States of America	15.5	2.4	43.3	1.2
Indonesia	14.4	2.2	34.3	1.0
Born elsewhere overseas	258.1	39.7	1 791.4	50.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>649.4</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>3 554.4</b>	<b>100.0</b>

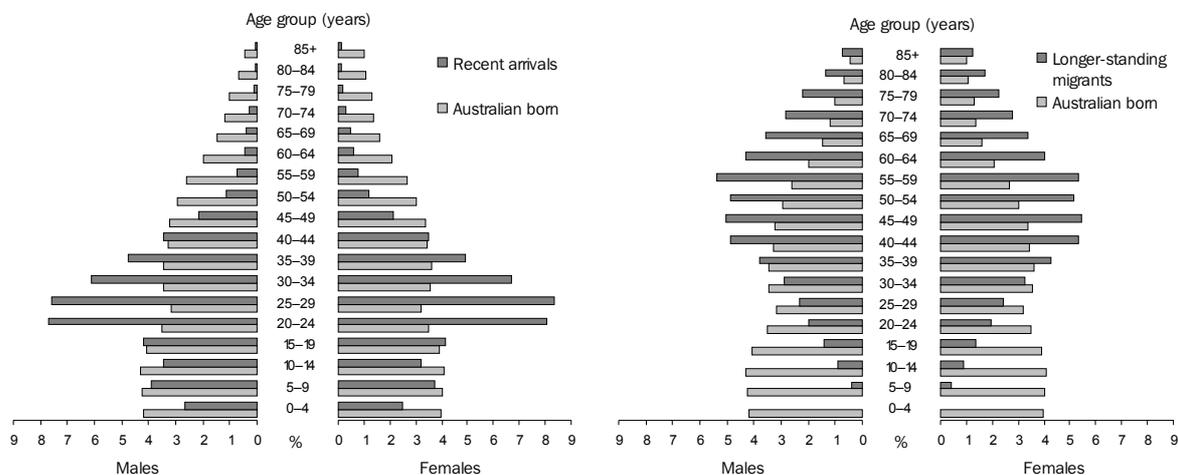
Chinese-born recent arrivals were largely students and many had not yet started a family. Two thirds were aged 20–39 years, and of these, 65% were students and 61% were unmarried. This contrasts with Australia’s overall 20–39 year old population, of which 16% were students, and 45% were unmarried.

Over the past decade, the Government's focus on attracting skilled migrants has resulted in an influx of working age overseas arrivals. Since the late 1990s, the Skill Stream of Australia's Migration Program has been the largest and

fastest growing stream (compared to the Family, and Special Eligibility streams, as well as the Humanitarian Program). During 1996–97, the Skill Stream accounted for approximately 23% of all migrants, and by 2006–07 this had increased to 43%.<sup>4</sup>

During the first few years of settlement, many migrants experience difficulty getting work. At the time of the 2006 Census, the unemployment rate<sup>5</sup> was 11.8% for recent arrivals and 5.3% for longer-standing migrants. The birthplace groups with the highest

Age and sex distribution: overseas-born groups and Australian-born



unemployment rates were Sudan (28.7%), Iraq (22.3%), and Afghanistan (17.8%). These countries, which have all been affected by war, feature high proportions of recently arrived people, many of whom arrived through the Humanitarian Program. People born in Ireland and Italy had the lowest unemployment rates (3.3% and 3.5% respectively).

## Citizenship rises with age and time

At the time of the 2006 Census, 68% of Australia's overseas-born residents indicated they held Australian citizenship. The proportion of Australians with citizenship increases with the length of time spent in Australia, as well as with age. Of all people who had arrived before 1994, 82% were citizens, compared to 54% of people who had arrived during 1999–2000 and 37% of those who had arrived during 2001–02.

Similarly, 80% of the overseas-born population who were aged 50 and over were Australian citizens, compared with 47% of those aged 18–29 and 58% of those aged 30–39 years. These similarities are largely explained by the close connection between age and time spent in Australia (i.e. the older overseas-born population have been in Australia for longer periods of time).

In 2006, Australia's Greek and Croatian-born populations had the highest Australian citizenship rates at 97% and 96% respectively.<sup>3</sup> This reflects their relatively old ages and lengthy periods of time spent in Australia.

The birthplace with the lowest citizenship rate was Japan, with only 15% of Japanese-born residents holding Australian citizenship. Of those born in Japan, half were aged 33 or under, and half arrived in Australia after 1999.

Low citizenship rates may reflect source country rules regarding dual citizenship, and plans for returning after emigration.

## Australia's close links to Europe

In total, more than 200 ancestries were separately identified in the 2006 Census, many of which were relatively uncommon. The most common ancestries were Australian (7.4 million people) and English (6.3 million people). Of people who responded to the

ancestry question, 31% reported two ancestries (the census form asked for only two ancestries).

Responses to the ancestry question in the census give a richer picture of Australia's cultural background. For example, although 76% of the population were born in Australia, only 37% reported Australian ancestry. This lower figure may be partly explained by the high proportion of people with parents and grandparents born overseas. Around two thirds of the Australian ancestry group did not state a second ancestry.

From the beginning of the colonial period, people from the United Kingdom and Ireland have made up a large majority of arrivals to Australia. This long term presence is reflected by the high numbers of people who identified with the following ancestries: English (6.3 million), Irish (1.8 million), and Scottish (1.5 million).

In 2006, the leading ancestries other than Australian, British and Irish reflected the major waves of migration after the Second World War. These groups ranged in number from the 852,000 people who reported Italian ancestry to the 164,000 who reported Polish ancestry. They included ancestries associated with earlier waves of post-war immigration, such as German (812,000) and more recent immigration, such as Indian (235,000). First and second generation Australians made up a substantial majority of all these groups except German ancestry. As recorded in the previous census, those identifying with German ancestry were mostly third-plus generation Australians (62% in 2006).

**First generation Australians** are people living in Australia who were born overseas. In 2006, there were 4.4 million first generation Australians (24% of the population).

**Second generation Australians** are Australian-born people living in Australia, with at least one overseas-born parent. In 2006, there were 3.6 million second generation Australians (20% of the population).

**Third-plus generation Australians** are Australian-born people whose parents were both born in Australia. In 2006, there were 10.1 million third-plus generation Australians (56% of the population).

Top 10 ancestries by generation

Ancestry	Persons(a) '000	Proportion of total population %	Generations in Australia			Also stated another ancestry %
			First generation Australians %	Second generation Australians %	Third-plus generation Australians %	
Australian	7 371.8	37.1	1.8	17.3	80.9	34.9
English	6 283.6	31.6	19.3	21.2	59.5	51.6
Irish	1 803.7	9.1	12.5	14.0	73.5	80.1
Scottish	1 501.2	7.6	18.1	20.7	61.2	77.3
Italian	852.4	4.3	27.1	42.3	30.6	41.2
German	811.5	4.1	18.1	20.4	61.5	74.1
Chinese	669.9	3.4	74.2	21.0	4.8	16.9
Greek	365.2	1.8	34.4	45.6	20.0	23.4
Dutch	310.1	1.6	34.2	44.4	21.4	53.6
Indian	234.7	1.2	77.6	20.5	2.0	17.5

(a) Table presents collective responses to ancestry question. As some people stated two ancestries, the total persons for all ancestries exceed Australia's total population.

The 2006 Census showed most people of most ancestries were born either in the country associated with that ancestry or Australia. For example, of the people stating Italian ancestry, 73% were born in Australia, and 23% were born in Italy, and the remaining 4% born in other countries. However, of people of Chinese ancestry, 44% were born in countries other than Australia and China; and of people of Indian ancestry 28% were born in countries other than Australia and India.

People of Irish and Scottish ancestries were the most likely to state a second ancestry<sup>6</sup>, with 80% of people of Irish ancestry also stating a second ancestry. Both groups had high proportions of third-plus generation Australians (accounting for 73% of all who stated Irish ancestry and 61% for the Scottish). This ancestral depth can be attributed to the length of time since the first Irish and Scottish migrants arrived, as well as the extent to which they married people from different backgrounds.

The next most likely ancestries to occur in combination with another ancestry were people of Norwegian (75%), German (74%) and Danish (74%) ancestry. These people were largely third-plus generation Australians (46%, 62% and 52% respectively).

People of non-European ancestries were less likely to state a second ancestry. The least likely were people of Korean ancestry (only

4.7% stated a second ancestry). Around 87% of people who stated Korean ancestry were born overseas, and of these, only 10% arrived before 1985.

### Mostly Christian, but non-Christians on the rise

The 2006 Census revealed that Australian society is growing in religious diversity, and is no longer as strongly affiliated to traditional religions. Even so, in 2006, Christianity was the most common religion of those born in Australia and overseas (69% and 61% respectively). Australia's changing migration stream has influenced the country's religious profile. The ongoing growth in arrivals from Asia has resulted in large increases in the number of Buddhists, Muslims, and Hindus. In 2006, these three faiths collectively accounted for 907,000 affiliates compared to 468,000 a decade earlier in 1996.

Secularisation is another emerging trend. Since the 1971 Census first introduced 'No Religion' as an option, the group has grown from 6.7% of the population to 18.7% in 2006. This shift is largely the result of younger members of the population being more likely to state no religion than older people. In 2006, 7.9% of Australians aged 65 and over stated 'No Religion', compared to 23.5% of those aged 15–34.

## The religion question

The question asking people to report their religion has been included in every national census. In 1911 and 1921 an instruction was included indicating that people could object to state their religion.

From 1933, the voluntary nature of the religion question has been emphasised on the form. In 2006, 11% did not respond. The question does not measure the respondent's level of commitment to their religion or their active involvement. Participation in religious groups is collected in another Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) survey, the General Social Survey, cat. no. 4159.0.

## Catholicism stable among shrinking denominations

In every census most Australians have reported an affiliation with Christianity—in 2006, this majority was 12.7 million people. However, affiliation to Christianity has fallen from 96% in 1911 to 64% in 2006.

Over this period, the two most common denominations, Catholic and Anglican, experienced notably different change. Between 1911 and 2006, Catholics steadily grew from 22% to 26% of the population, but the proportion of Anglicans declined from 38% to 19%. These changes in Australia's Christian profile are due in part to the decline in the proportion of migrants coming from the United Kingdom, and the increase from countries with predominantly Catholic populations.

More recently, the sizes of Christian denominations have fluctuated to varying degrees. Between 1996 and 2006, Catholicism grew by 328,000 to 5.1 million. Over the same time, the next most common Christian denominations, Anglican, Uniting, and Presbyterian and Reformed, decreased by 463,000, leaving 5.4 million people affiliated with these denominations in 2006. It is unclear whether the decline is the result of an ageing group of affiliates, or changing alliances. However, some smaller Christian denominations experienced large growth over this period. For example, those identifying with Pentecostal grew by 26% to around 220,000 since 1996.

## Intermarriage reflects migration

At the time of the 2006 Census, in 59% of all couple relationships<sup>7</sup> (both registered and social marriages), both the man and the woman were born in Australia. In the remaining 41% of relationships, one or both members of the couple were born overseas.

Overseas-born partners of Australian-born men and women were most likely born in the two most common overseas countries of birth—the United Kingdom and New Zealand. Of the overseas-born population who were in couple relationships with Australian-born people, 41% of the men, and 38% of the women, were born in the United Kingdom. Australian-born men and women were similarly represented in relationships with New Zealanders (accounting for 11% of each of the sexes' overseas-born choices).

Italy was the third most common birthplace of men partnered with Australian-born women (23,700 Italian men). However, Australian-born men, with only 8,100 Italian-born wives, were more likely to find a life partner from somewhere else. For example, 17,000 Australian men were in a couple relationship with a Philippines-born woman. In comparison, only 1,800 Australian-born women were in a couple relationship with a Philippines-born man.

In 2006, almost twice as many Australian-born women as men were with partners born in Southern and Eastern Europe (59,900 to 30,600). Meanwhile, three times as many Australian-born men than women had partners born in South-East and North-East Asia (51,200 to 15,100). It should be noted that birthplace is only one cultural background measure and partners born in different countries commonly share similar ancestries.

Change in religious affiliations, 1996–2006

Religion	Population in 2006		Change between 1996–2006		Proportion born overseas	
	'000	%		%		%
<i>Christian</i>	12 685.8	63.9		0.8		21.7
Catholic	5 126.9	25.8		6.8		23.4
Anglican	3 718.2	18.7		-4.7		16.7
Uniting Church	1 135.4	5.7		-14.9		10.2
Presbyterian and Reformed	596.7	3.0		-11.7		24.1
Eastern Orthodox	544.2	2.7		9.5		46.6
Baptist	316.7	1.6		7.3		24.3
Lutheran	251.1	1.3		0.4		26.0
Pentecostal	219.7	1.1		25.7		27.6
Other Christian	776.9	3.9		19.0		28.5
<i>Non-Christian</i>	1 105.1	5.6		79.3		65.3
Buddhism	418.8	2.1		109.6		70.8
Islam	340.4	1.7		69.4		60.7
Hinduism	148.1	0.7		120.2		83.6
Judaism	88.8	0.4		11.3		50.7
Other non-Christian	109.0	0.5		58.8		45.2
No Religion	3 706.6	18.7		25.7		20.9
<b>Total(a)</b>	<b>19 855.3</b>	<b>100.0</b>		<b>11.8</b>		<b>23.9</b>

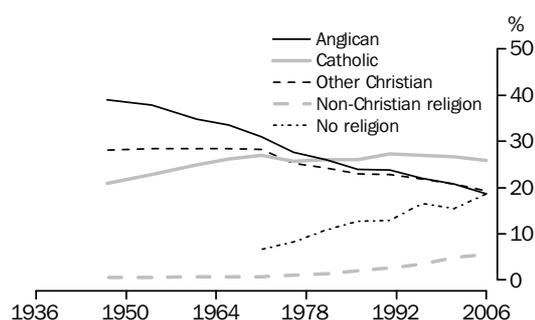
(a) Total includes inadequately described religions and people who did not state a religion.

Non-Christian religions growing fast

Recent migration, particularly from Asia and the Middle East, has led to high growth in the main non-Christian religions. Between 1996 and 2006, the number of people affiliated with non-Christian faiths increased from around 0.6 million to 1.1 million, and accounted for 5.6% of the total population in 2006 (up from 3.5% in 1996). In 2006, 91% of people affiliated with non-Christian religions were either born overseas (66%) or had at least one parent born overseas (25%). In comparison, 44% of the total population were either born overseas (24%) or had at least one parent born overseas (20%).

In 2006, Australia's three most common non-Christian religions were Buddhism (accounting for 2.1% of the population), Islam (1.7%) and Hinduism (0.7%). Of these groups, Hinduism

Broad trends in religion, 1946–2006



experienced the fastest growth since 1996, more than doubling to 148,000, followed by Buddhism which doubled to 419,000. Australia's religious groups are further discussed in the article 'Religion across the generations', p. 54–58.

## Christian arrivals from non-Christian countries

The growth of the main non-Christian religions in Australia has been driven largely by migration. However, in 2006, large proportions of Australian residents, born in predominantly non-Christian countries, identified themselves as Christians. These differences may reflect disproportionate Christian migration from these countries.

For example, Indonesia's religious profile, consisting of 88% Islam and 9% Christian affiliates in 2000, differed markedly from Australia's 2006 Indonesian-born population which consisted of 17% Islam and 59% Christian affiliates. In 2000, only 9% of Malaysia's population were Christian; but 43% of Malaysian-born people living in Australia were Christian. Similarly, India's predominantly Hindu population (81% in 2001) was not reproduced in Australia, with 34% of Indian-born Australian residents stating a Christian religion in the 2006 Census (compared with 2.3% of India's population).<sup>8</sup>

## Christianity by selected birthplace groups and in home country

Country	Birthplace group in Australia who are Christian(a) %	Census data from selected countries	
		Christians in country <sup>8</sup> %	Census year
India	34.0	2.3	2001
Indonesia	59.0	8.9	2000
Malaysia	43.0	9.1	2000
Sri Lanka	44.2	6.9	2001

(a) 2006 Census data

## English dominant amongst many spoken languages

English is the national language of Australia. In 2006, 83% of the population (aged 5 years and over) spoke only English at home while less than 1% could not speak English at all. The ability to speak English is a criterion that improves the opportunities for migrants to enter Australia; and in 2006, over half the overseas-born population spoke English at home.

At the time of the 2006 Census, over 200 languages were spoken in Australian homes, reflecting past and current migration patterns, and to a lesser extent, the variety of Indigenous languages spoken by Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders. Of the 3 million people who spoke a non-English language at home, 74% were born overseas (first generation Australians) and an additional 21%

had at least one parent born overseas (second generation Australians). Speakers of Indigenous languages numbered 50,000 people and comprised 1.7% of all non-English speakers.

The most common non-English language was Italian, with its 311,600 speakers accounting for 1.8% of the Australian population. This was followed by Greek (1.4%), Cantonese (1.3%), Arabic (1.3%) and Mandarin (1.2%). These four languages were each spoken at home by more than 200,000 people.

The ranking of languages partly reflects the number of migrants who arrived from certain countries, as well as the size of their families. However, not all migrants who speak languages other than English continue to use them at home, nor do their children always learn the language or continue to speak it. As a result, certain languages have been maintained in the home to a greater extent than others.

Top 10 languages spoken at home(a)

Language spoken at home	Persons '000	Proportion of total population %	Proportion who spoke English very well %	Proportion born in Australia %
English	14 577.7	83.0	..	84.6
Italian	311.6	1.8	59.5	41.1
Greek	242.7	1.4	62.6	51.0
Cantonese	236.0	1.3	44.5	18.8
Arabic	224.7	1.3	61.4	38.8
Mandarin	211.7	1.2	37.8	9.6
Vietnamese	181.2	1.0	36.6	25.5
Spanish	93.9	0.5	59.8	21.6
German	73.4	0.4	76.8	17.9
Hindi	66.4	0.4	83.0	10.3

(a) Excludes persons aged under 5 years.

Consistent with migration trends, between 1996 and 2006, the largest increases in languages other than English were those originating from Asia. During this time, the languages<sup>9</sup> with the largest increases were Mandarin and Hindi, which both more than doubled in speakers to 212,000 and 66,000 people respectively.

Reflecting the older ages of their speakers, European languages have experienced the largest decreases. The German speaking population had the largest proportional decrease and, by 2006, had contracted to three quarters of its 1996 size. The Italian language had the largest numerical decrease in speakers (down 56,000).

Some languages are better retained by later generations than others. For example, third-plus generation Australians of Greek ancestry were more likely than their Italian counterparts to speak a non-English language (28.7% and 5.4% respectively). The extent of language retention may relate to the age people leave home, as well as their propensity to marry people of other ethnicities.

## Endnotes

1 Includes independent states, inhabited dependent territories, and areas of special sovereignty.

2 Comprises North-East Asia, South-East Asia and Southern and Central Asia

3 These groups exclude countries of birth with less than 5000 people in Australia.

4 Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) 2007, *Settler arrivals 2006-07*, DIAC, Canberra.

5 Unemployment rate calculated as people aged 15-64 years who are in the labour force and unemployed.

6 Excludes ancestries with populations of less than 5000 people in Australia.

7 Does not include same-sex partnerships.

8 United Nations Statistical Division (UNSD), *Demographic Yearbook: Volume 2b – Ethnocultural characteristics, Table 6*, viewed 24 November 2008, <<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/dyb/dybcens.htm>>

9 Of the leading 25 non-English languages spoken in 2006.