



Department of Local Government,  
Sport and Cultural Industries  
Office of Multicultural Interests



# CENSUS 2021 HIGHLIGHTS

Western Australia's Changing  
Population And Cultural Diversity


# Preface

**The Office of Multicultural Interests (OMI) is a division of the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries (DLGSC). Its key role is to assist the Western Australian Government on the development of State Government policies and programs to achieve the full potential of Western Australia's cultural diversity.**

As part of its role, OMI provides information and advice to public, private and not-for-profit sectors to ensure policies, programs and services are equitable, inclusive and responsive to the needs of the community.

OMI also builds capacity and empowers culturally and linguistically diverse communities through information, funding and necessary support so they can participate fully in all aspects of Western Australian life.

This resource is informed by demographic and cultural diversity data derived from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Population and Housing Census which is collected every five years. The most recent Census was held in 2021, and the key population related data was released in September 2022.



**WA is home to people from around  
221 birthplaces, speaking over  
249 languages and dialects and  
following over 130  
religious faiths.**

# Background & Purpose

Australia is a vibrant and modern multicultural society, and one of the most cohesive in the world. Migration has been central to Australia's identity, progress and prosperity. The 2021 Population and Housing Census affirmed that Australia is one of the largest multicultural nations in the world and that WA is no exception.<sup>1</sup>

One in three Western Australians were born overseas – the highest proportion, compared to any other state or territory in Australia, over the last 50 years. With the number of first- and second-generation migrants reaching the new heights of 60 per cent of the resident population, cultural diversity is continuing to add to Western Australia's unique identity, strength and vibrancy.

This report highlights the cultural and linguistic diversity trends of WA and the changes that have occurred in the last 10 years. It examines the demographic and cultural diversity of Western Australians (usual residents), illustrating to what extent their composition is changing, how this diversity is distributed in Local Government Areas (LGAs), and how these trends compared nationally.

The analysis aims to support government, community, not-for-profit organisations and the business sector to develop evidence based, culturally appropriate and inclusive policies, programs and services. This contributes to the WA Government's vision for 'an inclusive and harmonious society where everyone has a strong sense of belonging, can participate and contribute fully to all aspects of life and can achieve their goals'.

## Section 1

### **The changing population of WA**

This includes the following data:

- Population size and growth
- Changing composition: demographic and cultural
- Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

## Section 2

### **Deciphering Western Australia's cultural diversity trends**

Measures changes in WA's cultural, linguistic and religious diversity profiles including

- overseas born
- top birthplaces
- the most common ancestries
- top religious affiliations
- top languages spoken at home
- English language proficiency
- identifying the emerging trends and groups at State level and in comparison with national level.

## Section 3

### **Cultural Diversity at the local level**

Showcases culturally diverse Local Government Areas (LGAs):

- the most culturally and linguistically diverse Metropolitan and Regional areas
- a cultural diversity matrix table
- conclusion.





# SECTION 1

The changing population of Western Australia

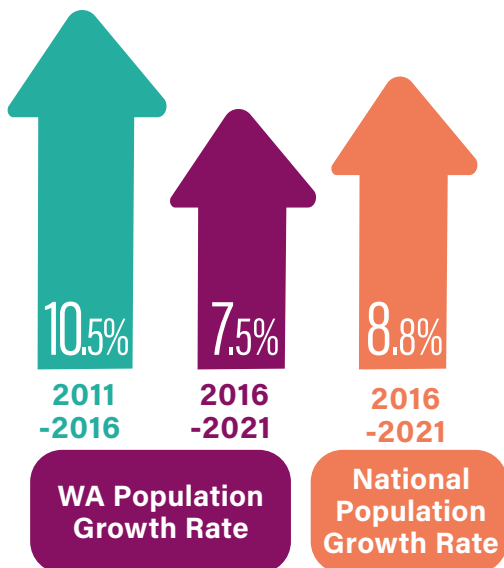
# Demographics and population growth

At the 2021 Census, 25,422,789 people were residing in Australia, showing an increase of 8.6 per cent since 2016, lower than the previous census period (8.8%). There were 2,660,026 resident Western Australians who comprised 10.5 per cent of the national population (25,422,789) consistent with 2016.

**2,660,026**  
An increase of 7.5% from 2016.

The number of Western Australians increased by 7.5 per cent between 2016 and 2021.

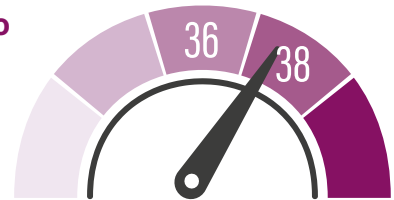
However, the **rate of increase** was slower (10.5%) compared with the previous census period (**2011-2016**) and the **national** growth rate (8.8%) (Figure 1.1). The COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent border restrictions were major factors influencing the population growth rate in WA.



Due to the reduced population growth rate, **median age** for Western Australians increased from **36 years to 38 years**, equivalent to the national median age

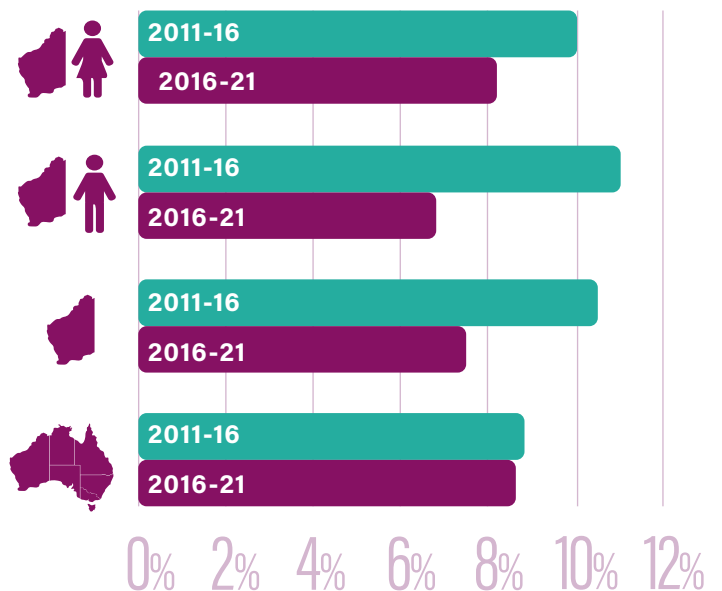
Median Age increased to

**38**



The Western Australian population was almost equally divided between male (49.7%) and female (50.3%). The rate of increase was slightly higher (8.2%) for females, compared to their male counterparts (6.8%) (Figure 1.1). Across Australia, the gender distribution was similar to WA, with 49.3 per cent male and 50.7 per cent female.

**Figure 1.1: Population growth since 2011, WA and Australia**



In contrast to previous Census periods, between 2016 and 2021, WA's population growth rate slowed down, and was below the national growth rate.

## Population composition and changes

**The 2021 Population and Housing Census affirmed that Australia is one of the largest multicultural nations in the world and that WA is no exception.<sup>1</sup>**

The WA population can be broadly seen as the Australia born including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) people and the overseas born that includes people from main and non-main English-speaking (MES and NMES) birthplaces (Table 1.1).<sup>2</sup>

In WA, the number of people that were born in Australia was 1.6 million, and its proportion of population increased from 60.3 per cent to 62 per cent between 2016 and 2021.

This is not consistent with the trend in the previous Census period, when the proportion of the Australia born fell from 63 per cent in 2011 to 60.3 per cent in 2016.

The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) people reached almost 89,000 and their share of WA's population has also increased to 3.3 per cent, compared with 3.1 per cent in both 2016 and 2011. This increase of +12,696 ATSI people was the largest since 2011.

The national averages for those born in Australia was higher (66.7%) and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was slightly lower at 3.2 per cent but were still comparable with WA.

**Table 1.1: Broad population composition and changes: 2021, 2016 and 2011**

Key facts	Western Australia		
	2021	2016	2011
<b>Total Population</b>	2,660,026	2,474,410	2,239,172
<b>Australia born</b>	1,648,794	1,492,842	1,411,516
As a% of total population	62.0	60.3	63.0
Intercensal growth*	+155,952 (10.5%)	+81,326 (5.8%)	+132,291 (10.3%)
<b>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (ATSI)</b>	88,693	75,997	69,643
As a% of total population	3.3	3.1	3.1
Intercensal growth*	+12,696 (16.7%)	+6,354 (8.4%)	+10,934 (18.6%)
<b>Overseas born</b>	856,025	796,305	684,510
As a% of total population	32.2	32.2	30.6
Intercensal growth*	+59,721 (7.5%)	+111,794 (14%)	+152,772 (28.7%)
<b>From a NMES birthplace</b>	464,628	410,254	319,725
As a% of total population	17.5	16.6	14.3
As a% of overseas born population	54.3	51.5	46.7
Intercensal growth*	+54,374 (13.2%)	+90,529 (28.3%)	+84,668 (26.5%)
<b>From a MES birthplace</b>	391,397	386,051	364,785
As a% of total population	14.7	15.6	16.3
As a% of Overseas born population	46.7	48.5	53.3
Intercensal growth*	+5,346 (1.4%)	+21,266 (5.8%)	+68,104 (23%)

\*Note: Intercensal growth refers to the growth between the two consecutive census periods. Therefore, 2011 census data is compared with 2006 census data.

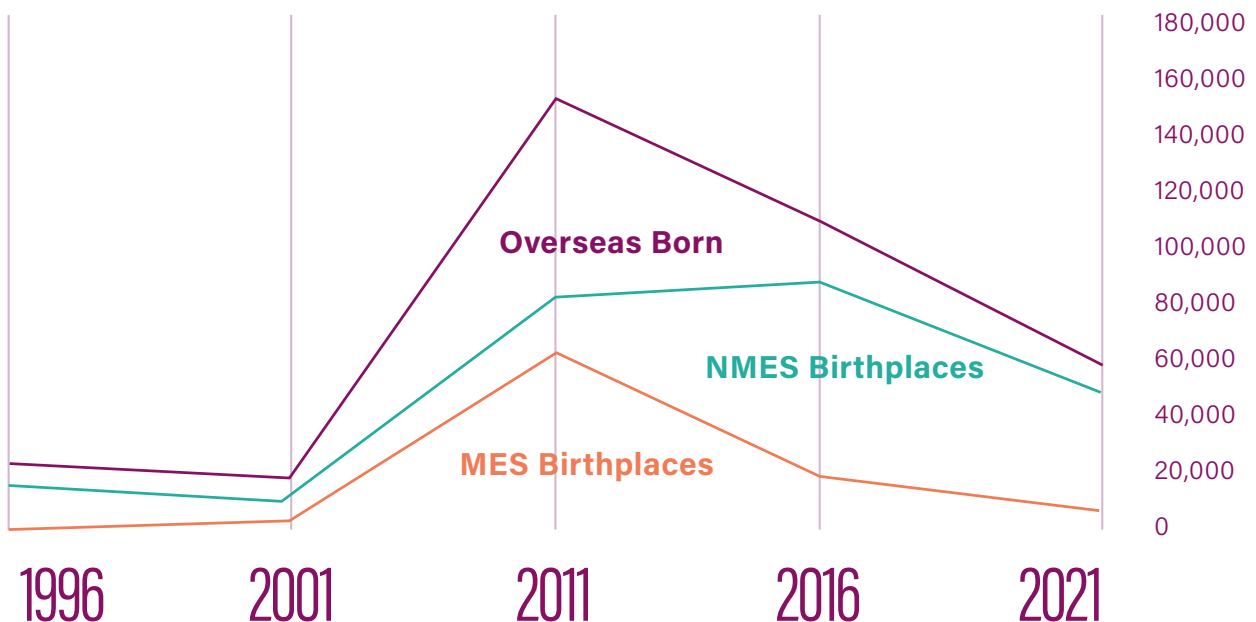
# 32.2%

of Western Australians were born overseas, consistently more than the national average of 27.6 per cent, and the highest among all States and Territories in Australia in the last 50 years.

WA's higher proportion of overseas born people (32.2%) compared to the national average can be attributed to a large proportion of migrants from the United Kingdom (UK), South-East Asia (mainly Singapore) and Africa (particularly South Africa and Zimbabwe) that reside in WA. For example, those born in the United Kingdom comprised more than one-quarter of overseas born population in WA, compared with the national average of less than one-fifth of overseas born population. Similarly, almost one third of Australia's Zimbabwe born (32.1%) and around one-quarter of Singapore born (26.2%) and South Africa born (23.7%) people, lived in WA.<sup>3</sup>

Growth in the number of migrants peaked in 2011, mainly due to changes to Australia's immigration policy, leading to an increase in the intake of skilled migrants. Parallely, since 2006 there has been a higher growth of migrants from from NMES birthplaces, compared to their counterparts from MES birthplaces (Figure 1.2), mainly arriving from South-East, Southern, Central Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 1.2: Growth in the number of migrants by main and non-main English-speaking birthplaces since 1996**







Australia is one of the largest multicultural nations in the world and Western Australia is no exception.

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# COVID-19 related impact on population growth

The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent border restrictions between 2020 and 2021 impacted the population growth rate and cultural diversity trends of the last five years.

The year of arrival data of overseas born in the period before the COVID-19 pandemic (2016 to 2019) and after (2020 to 2021), shows a sharp decline for both WA and Australia.

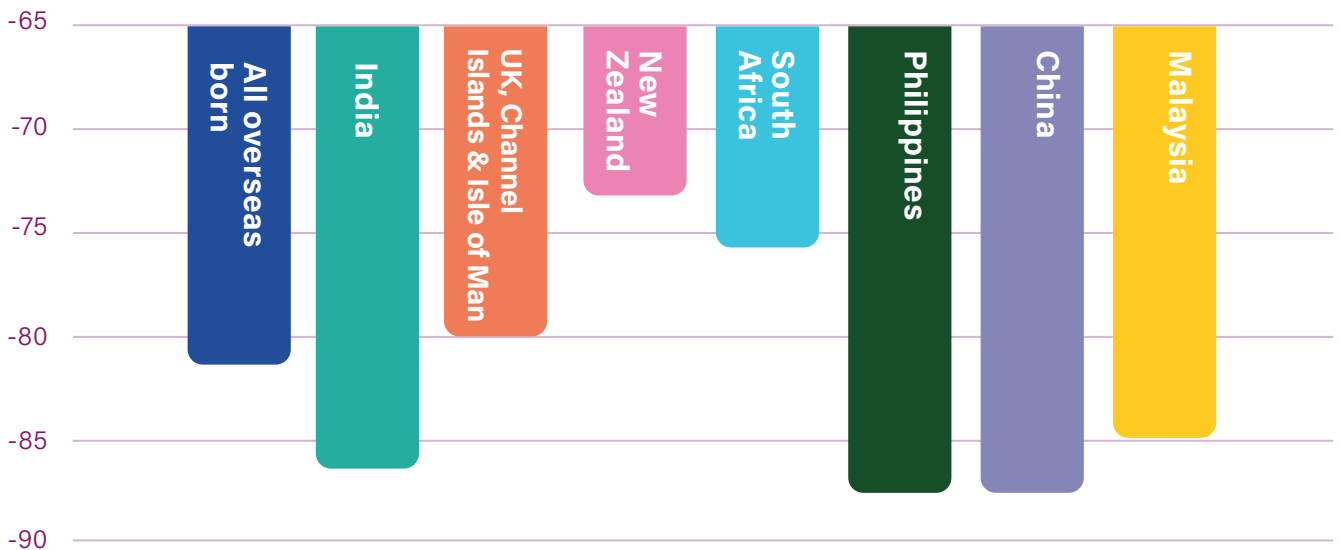
For example, compared with 2018-19, migration in 2020-21 decreased by 66 per cent (from 52,306 to 17,794) and 72.3 per cent (from 599,629 to 166,122), for WA and Australia respectively.

Accordingly, there was a significant impact in the rate of migration from the major source countries of skilled migrants, international students and all other categories of migrants during this period (Figure 1.3).

For example, migration from India, China, the Philippines and Malaysia to WA decreased more than the State average (66%)— by 77 per cent, 76.6 per cent, 74.1 per cent and 68.8 per cent, respectively (Figure 1.3).

The corresponding figures for Australia were: -77.3 per cent, -78.9 per cent, -76 per cent and -75.9 per cent, respectively—compared with the national average of 72.3 per cent. (Figure 1.3).

**Fig 1.3: Drop in WA arrivals (%) from the most common overseas birthplaces due to the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-21 arrivals in comparison with 2018-19 arrivals)**



**The State average for overseas born arrivals dropped significantly (by 66%) during the peak of the pandemic.**

It is subsequently forecasted that **Australia's population will have 1.9 million fewer people in the next 20 years**, compared to what it would have been without the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>5</sup>

This is reflected in the absolute decline in the migrant population for certain age groups from MES and NMES birthplaces.

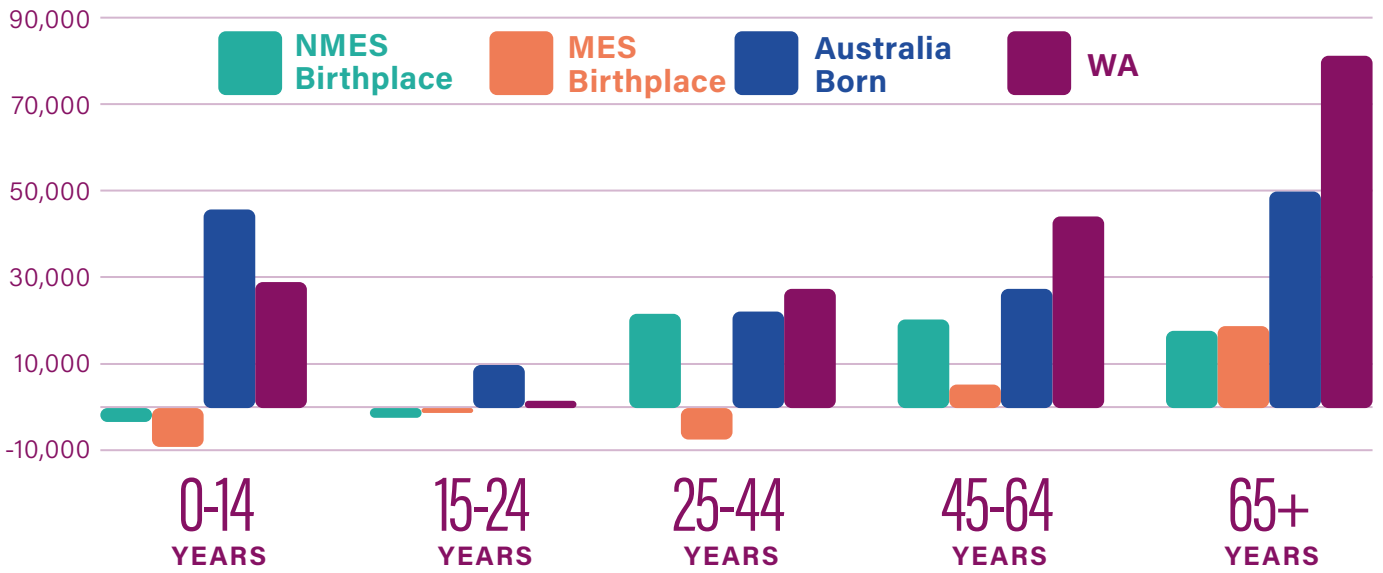
For example, for Western Australians from NMES birthplaces, the number of children (0–14 years) and youth population (15–24 years) declined by -3,551 and -2,504 respectively, between 2016 and

2021, while seniors (aged 65+ years) increased by +18,039, as seen in Figure 1.4.

In the case of those from MES birthplaces, the decline was most notable for children by -9,528 and young adults (25–44 years) by -8,122 people, and so was the increase for seniors by almost +20,000 people.

**The pandemic affected the age-distribution for migrant communities in WA.**

**Figure 1.4: Growth in WA population by birthplaces and broad age groups between 2016 and 2021**



However, since 2016 there has been no decline in the absolute number of people in each age bracket for the overall WA population, mainly due to the increase in the Australia born population including the second and third generation migrants.

The percentage growth was highest for seniors (23.8%), compared with younger people (0.6% and 3.8% for 14–24 and 25–44 years, respectively). This was largely due to the ageing of the migrant population, mainly those migrated during the post-World War II period and who arrived from MES birthplaces.

**Australia's population will have 1.9 million fewer people in the next 20 years than were forecasted prior to COVID-19, due to the negative migration trend during the COVID-19 pandemic.**





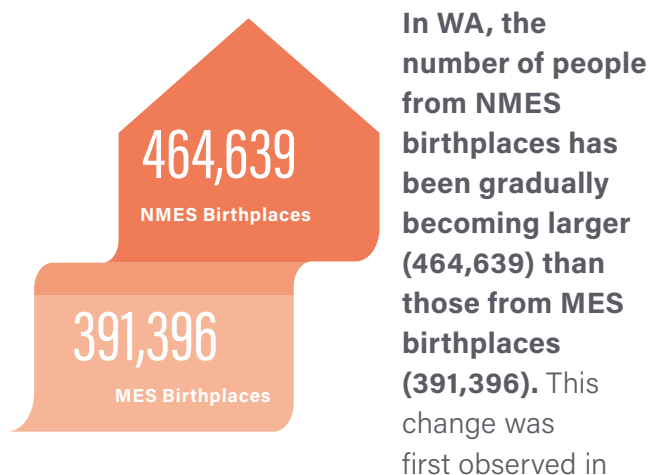
# SECTION 2

Deciphering WA's cultural diversity trends

# Changing composition of the overseas born

As in the rest of Australia, WA is home to many people from diverse cultural backgrounds and heritage, with the proportion of resident population who were born overseas (first generation) or have a parent born overseas (second generation) reaching new heights to almost 60 per cent in 2021. The corresponding figure for Australia was 51.5 per cent.

People born overseas can be classified into main English-speaking (MES) birthplaces and non-main English-speaking (NMES) birthplaces, as shown previously (Table 1.1).



2016 and continued in 2021. Additionally, of the overseas born, the proportion of those from MES birthplaces is also almost double in WA (46.7%), compared with the national average (28.2%).

Since 2016, the rate of increase has been almost 10 times larger for people from NMES birthplaces (13.2%), compared with MES birthplaces (1.4%). The Census 2021 indicated that people from NMES birthplaces comprised 17.5 per cent of

Western Australians and 54.3 per cent of all overseas-born people, compared with 14.7 per cent and 46.7 per cent, respectively, for those from MES birthplaces. Nationally, people from NMES birthplaces comprised an even larger proportion of the total Australian population (19.7%) and overseas-born population (71.2%), compared with those from MES birthplaces (8% and 28.2%, respectively).

Migrants residing in WA, originated from birthplaces from all continents and regions across the globe. However over many decades, there has been a shift in the common birthplaces of migrants residing in the State. This is further discussed and analysed in the next section.

## Birthplace

**WA is home to people from around 221 birthplaces including sovereign countries and dependent territories, islands and protectorates. They speak over 249 languages and dialects including Aboriginal and sign languages, and follow more than 130 religious faiths.**

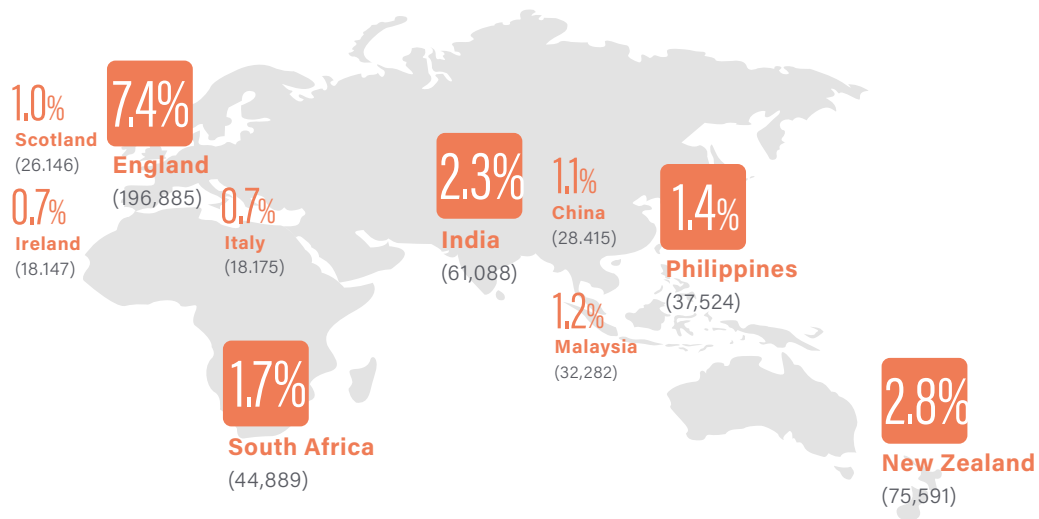
As shown in Table 2.1, there is strong representation of people from the United Kingdom, South-East Asia, Southern and Central Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa.

**NMES and MES are the acronyms for non-main English-speaking and main-English speaking birthplaces, respectively.**

**Table 2.1: Distribution of the overseas born by their regions of birth for WA and Australia, 2021**

Regions of birth 2021	Western Australia		Australia	
	Number	Overseas born (%)	Number	Overseas born (%)
United Kingdom, Channel Islands and Isle of Man	236,098	27.6	1,108,404	15.8
Southern and Eastern Europe	56,622	6.6	658,197	9.4
South-East Asia	140,523	16.4	1,051,437	15.0
Southern and Central Asia	96,179	11.2	1,150,155	16.4
North-East Asia	50,557	5.9	854,800	12.2
North Africa and the Middle East	26,112	3.1	454,856	6.5
Sub-Saharan Africa	85,748	10.0	372,151	5.3
Other Oceania and Antarctica	81,279	9.5	688,217	9.8
Americas	32,394	3.8	339,618	4.8
Total overseas born	856,021	100	7,029,262	100

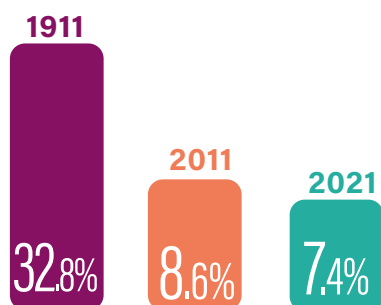
Outside Australia, the top 10 birthplaces for Western Australians in 2021 were England, New Zealand, India, South Africa, the Philippines, Malaysia, China, Scotland, Italy and Ireland—this is consistent with the results from the 2016 Census (Table 2.2).



**Table 2.2: The top 10 birthplaces of the overseas born in WA and changes over time, 2011– 2021**

Birthplace	2021	2016	2011	2011–2021 Growth	
	Number (%)	Number (%)	Number (%)	Number	Percentage
England	196,885 (7.4)	194,164 (7.8)	191,932 (8.6)	+4,953	2.6
New Zealand	75,591 (2.8)	79,222 (3.2)	70,734 (3.2)	+4,857	6.9
India	61,088 (2.3)	49,384 (2.0)	29,915 (1.3)	+31,173	104.2
South Africa	44,889 (1.7)	41,008 (1.7)	35,326 (1.6)	+9,563	27.1
Philippines	37,524 (1.4)	30,835 (1.2)	17,231 (0.8)	+20,293	117.8
Malaysia	32,282 (1.2)	29,124 (1.2)	24,967 (1.1)	+7,315	29.3
China	28,415 (1.1)	27,077 (1.1)	16,692 (0.7)	+11,723	70.2
Scotland	26,146 (1.0)	26,059 (1.1)	27,185 (1.2)	-1,039	-3.8
Italy	18,175 (0.7)	19,204 (0.8)	19,477 (0.9)	-1,302	-6.7
Ireland	18,147 (0.7)	18,034 (0.7)	14,295 (0.6)	+3,852	26.9

## Declining proportion of England born Western Australians over a century



Although England has remained the top birthplace for over a century (since 1911), the proportion of England born population has decreased considerably from **32.8 per cent in 1911, to 8.6 per cent in 2011, down to 7.4 per cent in 2021.**

Similarly, the proportion of people born in New Zealand, Scotland and Italy reduced in 2021 (from 3.2% to 2.8%, 1.2% to 1% and 0.9% to 0.7%, respectively). They also dropped in terms of absolute number of people since 2016 (Table 2.2).

In contrast, the growth of India as a birthplace was the largest, with an addition of 31,173 people between 2011 and 2021, an increase of 104.2 per cent. Its proportion of the State population has almost doubled from 1.3 per cent to 2.3 per cent. Similarly, the Philippines experienced the second-largest increase with an addition of 20,293 people, an increase by 117.8 per cent, comprising 1.4 per cent of WA's population, compared with 0.8 per cent in 2011.

The number of people born in China also increased by 11,723 (70.2%) during the same period, and of the population, from 0.7 per cent to 1.1 per cent. Of the other top birthplaces, the

proportion of Western Australians born in South Africa, Malaysia and Ireland also increased (from 1.6% to 1.7%, 1.1 % to 1.2% and 0.6% to 0.7%, respectively).

**The top 10 overseas birthplaces for WA haven't changed since 2016—with a clear shift towards the Asian region over time. Birthplaces with the highest increase of people since the last decade were India and the Philippines.**

These changes reflect the changing waves of migration in Australia and are the outcomes of multiple factors such as historic antecedents, immigration and foreign policy, labour market needs, global events and Australia's obligations as a signatory to the United Nation's human rights charters.

## Changing migration patterns over time

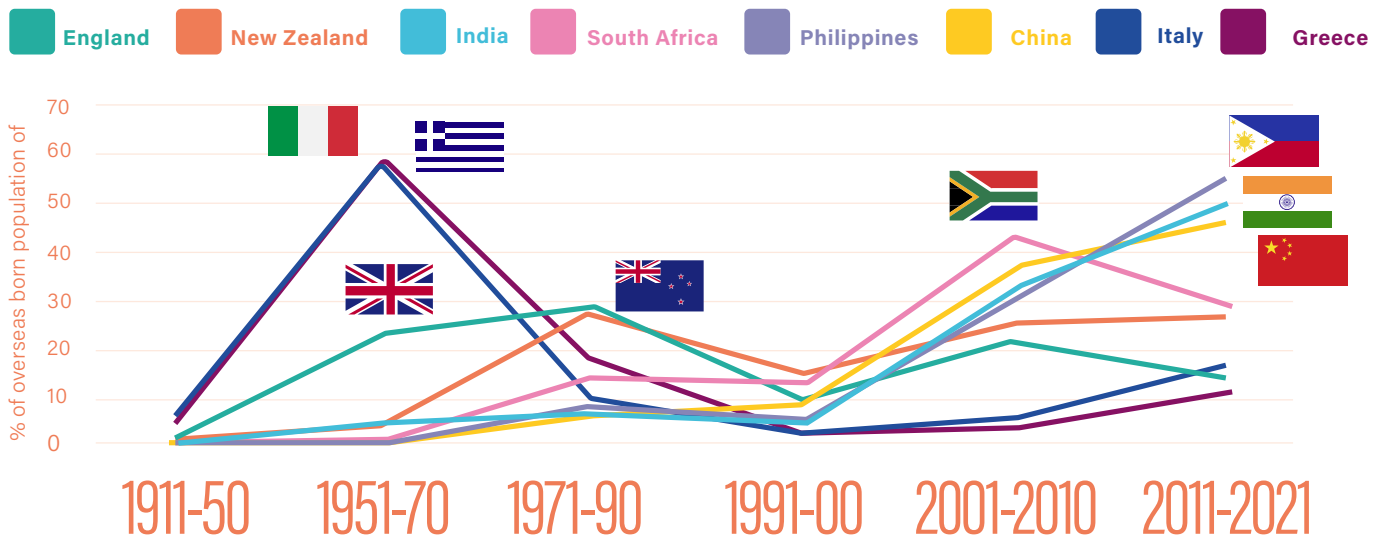
In the first half of the 20th century, the United Kingdom born migrants were the dominant group and their influx continued until 1981 through the Assisted Passage Migration Scheme in the context of the post-World War II environment (Figure 2.1).

However, driven by a critical labour shortage, there was greater support for 'unlimited immigration.' Moving away from the 'White Australia Policy', the doctrine of 'populate or perish' became the basis of a settlement-oriented immigration policy since the mid-20th century.<sup>6</sup>





**Figure 2.1: Year of arrival of overseas born Western Australians from common birthplaces**



Both Italian and Greek migration peaked during 1951 and 1970 with the Australian Government negotiating bilateral accords – Assisted Migration Agreements with many European countries such as the Netherlands and Italy (1951), Austria, Belgium, West Germany, Greece and Spain (1952), Switzerland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland and the United States (1954). For example, by 1954 the proportion of WA's England-born population declined to 42 per cent, and those born in Italy became the second-largest group comprising 12 per cent of overseas born population.<sup>7</sup>

With the dismantling of the 'White Australia' policy and passage of the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*, migration waves in Australia and WA were mainly influenced by two parallel trends from the late 1970s. One was the arrival of asylum seekers and humanitarian entrants displaced by civil war and the other was the arrival of permanent migrants with Australia opening its door to skilled migrants. There also were changes to policies regarding international students, that provided the opportunity for permanent settlement if a person had studied in Australia for at least two years on a temporary study visa.

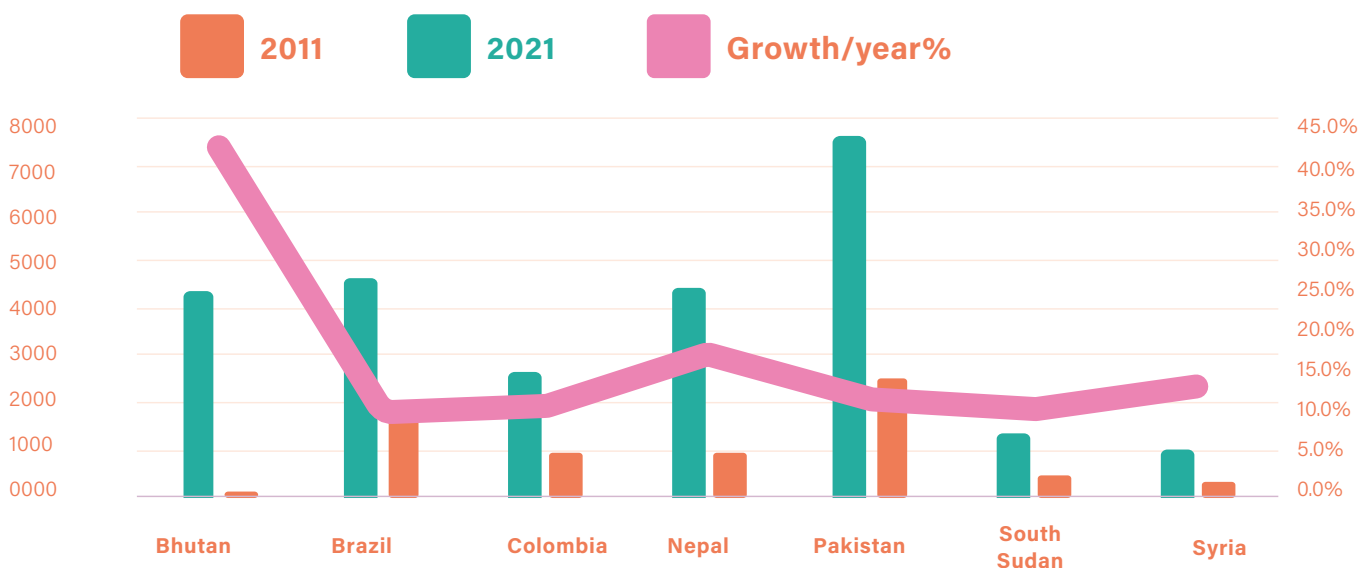
Asylum seekers arrived in Australia initially from the conflict zones of Indochina, Lebanon and Eastern Europe, followed by those from the Middle East, Afghanistan, East Africa, Sri Lanka, South Sudan, Syria and Ukraine.<sup>8</sup> From the 1980s, the arrival of skilled migrants and students grew, reaching highs in the 2000s. This was particularly noticeable in the case of people coming from India, China, Malaysia and the Philippines (Figure 2.1).

The parallel trend in the arrival of humanitarian entrants and skilled migrants continued between 2011 and 2021, with migration from birthplaces such as Bhutan, Nepal, Syria and South Sudan increasing during this time.

Birthplaces that have increased significantly with 1,000 or more people since 2011 (over 10% annually) were mainly from Asian and South American regions. In descending order, these birthplaces were **Bhutan, Nepal, Syria, Pakistan, Colombia, South Sudan or Brazil** (Figure 2.2).

**Birthplaces with 1,000 or more people that have grown most notably (more than 10% annually) since 2011 were: Bhutan, Nepal, Syria, Pakistan, Colombia, South Sudan and Brazil.**

**Figure 2.2: Fastest growing birthplaces with 1,000 or more people by annual average growth rate since 2011**



## Comparison across Australia

At the national level, the top birthplaces were England, India, China, New Zealand, the Philippines, Vietnam, South Africa, Malaysia, Italy and Sri Lanka. Except for Vietnam and Sri Lanka, the remaining birthplaces were the same as in WA.

However, there are notable differences in the ordering of birthplaces. For example, nationally since 2021 India has become the second largest birthplace, replacing China. However, for WA, India remained the third largest birthplace after England and New Zealand since 2016.

## Ancestry: the most common responses

**The most common ancestry responses of Western Australians have remained consistent since 2011—English, Australian, Irish, Scottish, Italian, Chinese, Australian Aboriginal, German, Indian and Dutch (Table 2.3).**

In 2021, Australian Aboriginal ancestry became the seventh most-common response, superseding German, while Filipino ancestry moved to 11th

place. It should be noted that if the Indian-related ancestry responses such as Punjabi, Malayali, Gujarati, Fijian Indian, Indian Tamil, Telugu and Sikh are added together, regardless of where someone, their parents or grandparents were born, then there will be 104,342 responses for the Indian ancestry making it the seventh largest response (Table 2.3).

The number of people who identified with Australian Aboriginal ancestry has quadrupled to 81,118 from 20,718 in 2016, showing a highly significant increase of 291.5 per cent, or an increase of 318.2 per cent in a decade (Table 5). This significant change was primarily due to changes in the data collection methodology and a 'result of the additional response categories to the ancestry question on the Census form'.<sup>9</sup>

Given that most of Australia's and WA's population are descendants of migrants, the most common ancestral groups typically align with the top birthplaces of Western Australians (Table 2.3). It should be noted that except for Australian Aboriginal, the most common ancestry responses remained almost the same in the last decade (since 2011), although in terms of proportions, there were changes.<sup>10</sup>

**Table 2.3: Most common ancestry responses for WA and growth since 2011**

Ancestry	2021	2016	2011	2011- 2021 Growth	
	Number (%)	Number (%)	Number (%)	Number	Percentage
English	1,000,796 (27.1)	931,147 (28.5)	848,230 (29.0)	+152,566	18.0
Australian	789,282 (21.4)	760,035 (22.5)	724,360 (24.8)	+64,922	9.0
Irish	233,323 (6.3)	224,372 (6.6)	187,038 (6.4)	+46,285	24.7
Scottish	232,541 (6.3)	214,153 (6.6)	186,475 (6.4)	+46,066	24.7
Italian	137,255 (3.7)	122,944 (3.9)	111,894 (3.8)	+25,361	22.7
Chinese	116,847 (3.2)	103,683 (3.3)	75,935 (2.6)	+40,912	53.9
Indian*	104,342 (2.8)	79,786 (2.5)	47,434 (1.7)	+56,808	119.7
Australian Aboriginal	81,118 (2.2)	20,718 (2.2)	19,397 (0.7)	+61,721	318.2
German	78,330 (2.1)	73,062 (2.2)	63,020 (2.2)	+15,310	24.3
Dutch	52,844 (1.4)	47,039 (1.5)	45,317 (1.6)	+7,527	16.6

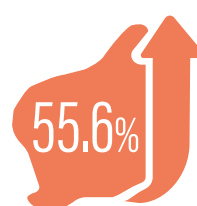
\*Note: Indian ancestry data includes Indian-related ancestry responses such as Punjabi, Malayali, Gujarati, Fijian Indian, Indian Tamil, Telugu and Sikh. The Indian ancestry response without inclusion of other related Indian ancestry responses, was 77,357, making it the ninth most common response.

## Changing settlement pattern and intergenerational story

**Due to the long period of settlement in WA for many early migrant groups, there is a larger number of second- and third-generation migrants from these communities born in Australia.**

An example of an early migrant community is people with an Italian ancestry. According to the 2021 Census, of those who reported an Italian ancestry, 110,497 (or 80.5%) were born in Australia, while only 17,479 (12.7%) were born in Italy. In contrast, India remained the top birthplace for more than half (51.8%) of those

who identified with an Indian ancestry, followed by more than one-quarter (28.6%) of those who were born in Australia.



**In 2021, the proportion of Western Australians having one or both parents born overseas increased from 53.8 per cent in 2016 to 55.6 per cent (Table 2.4).**

Since 2011, the increase in the number of parents born overseas was estimated at 214,075, more than double compared with parents born in Australia (105,124).

**Table 2.4: Either or both parents born overseas or in Australia between 2011-2021**

Parents' birthplace	2021	2016	2011	Growth 2011-2021	
	Number (%)	Number (%)	Number (%)	Number	%
Both parents born overseas	1,000,796 (41.6)	1,001,150 (40.5)	854,107 (41.4)	+146,689	17.2
Father only born overseas	207,167 (7.8)	184,890 (7.5)	175,317 (8.5)	+31,850	15.3
Mother only born overseas	165,635 (6.2)	144,217 (5.8)	130,099 (6.3)	+35,536	27.3
Both parents born in Australia	1,008,229 (37.9)	947,977 (38.3)	903,105 (43.8)	+105,124	11.6



## Ancestry: a strong indicator of cultural diversity

Ancestry is an important indicator to determine the level of cultural diversity in WA. Data indicators relating to the Country of birth (excluding 'main English-speaking countries') and Language other than English spoken at home, are not sufficient to capture all people from CaLD backgrounds. Reliance on these two indicators without ancestry data can exclude significant numbers of people from CaLD backgrounds, especially those who were born in Australia or in main-English speaking birthplaces or use English at home, irrespective of their proficiency (high or low) in languages other than English.<sup>11</sup>

For example, seven in every 10 Western Australians identified with non-Australian ancestry in 2021.<sup>12</sup> In addition, if other Anglo-Saxon, Anglo-Celtic and related ancestry responses including New Zealander are also excluded, then the estimated proportion of people from CaLD backgrounds will be more than one quarter (26.7%).<sup>13</sup>

Since the proportion of people from CaLD backgrounds becomes larger when estimated by combining relevant ancestry responses (26.7%), compared with the figures derived from birthplace (17.5%) or Language other than English spoken at home (18.7%), it is important to apply multiple indicators in measuring cultural diversity.<sup>14</sup>

**Ancestry is an important indicator to determine the level of cultural diversity. Considering relevant ancestry responses, over one-quarter of Western Australians can be classified as people from CaLD backgrounds, larger compared with the figures derived from birthplace (17.5%) or language-based data (18.7%).**

## Comparison across Australia

Except for Greek ancestry, the most common ancestry responses are the same as those at the national level: English, Australian, Irish, Scottish, Italian, Chinese, German, Indian, Australian Aboriginal and Greek.

Also, nationally, there has been a significant growth (414.4%) in Australian Aboriginal ancestry responses since 2016, a trend similar to WA responses (291.5%).

The average for Australians with either or both parents born overseas is smaller at 48.2 per cent, compared to that for Western Australians (55.6%).

## Languages spoken at home

Shared language is a component of culture and cultural diversity. The number and proportion of resident Western Australians speaking a language other than English (LOTE) at home has increased consistently over time.

For example, there were 497,504 LOTE speakers in WA comprising 18.7 per cent of the population, registering an increase from 437,869 (17.7%) in 2016. Within the past decade, the number of LOTE speakers increased by 170,192 (or 52%).

During the same period, the proportion of people who spoke English only at home reduced from 79.3 per cent to 75.3 per cent.

This change is not surprising given that most LOTE speakers were first-generation Western Australians migrating from NMES birthplaces (Table 2.5).

**In 2021, there were 497,504 LOTE speakers in WA comprising 18.7 per cent of the population. Since 2011, the number of LOTE speakers have increased by 52 per cent.**

## Changing patterns of linguistic diversity

**The top 10 LOTEs spoken at home** remained similar to those recorded in 2016. They were, in descending order: **Mandarin, Italian, Vietnamese, Punjabi, Cantonese, Tagalog, Arabic, Afrikaans, Spanish and Filipino.**

However, there are some notable differences in the ranking of these languages in 2021, compared with 2016:

- Punjabi replaced Cantonese and became the fourth most common language spoken at home
- Spanish was elevated to the ninth most common language, replacing Indonesian, which moved to the 11th position
- Filipino, in addition to Tagalog, also featured as the 10th most common language, demoting Hindi to the 12th position.

The number of Italian speakers has reduced, while those speaking Cantonese and Afrikaans experienced slow growth. **Languages that had the highest growth during the last decade included Mandarin, Punjabi, Tagalog and Filipino (Table 2.5).**

**Table 2.5: Top 10 LOTE spoken at home in WA and growth since 2011**

Languages	2021	2016	2011	Growth 2011–2021	
	Number (%)	Number (%)	Number (%)	Number	Percentage
<b>Mandarin</b>	51,751 (1.9)	47,846 (1.9)	28,032 (1.3)	+23,719	84.6
<b>Italian</b>	25,432 (1.0)	29,397 (1.2)	31,449 (1.4)	-6,017	-19.2
<b>Vietnamese</b>	22,763 (0.9)	20,242 (0.8)	16,522 (0.7)	+6,241	37.8
<b>Punjabi</b>	20,613 (0.8)	12,228 (0.5)	4,819 (0.2)	+15,794	327.7
<b>Cantonese</b>	19,683 (0.7)	19,340 (0.8)	18,006 (0.8)	+1,677	9.3
<b>Tagalog</b>	17,313 (0.7)	15,265 (0.6)	8,288 (0.4)	+9,025	108.9
<b>Arabic</b>	16,000 (0.6)	14,129 (0.6)	11,958 (0.5)	+4,042	33.8
<b>Afrikaans</b>	14,729 (0.6)	14,207 (0.6)	10,928 (0.5)	+3,801	34.8
<b>Spanish</b>	12,958 (0.5)	10,415 (0.4)	8,227 (0.4)	+4,731	57.5
<b>Filipino</b>	12,501 (0.5)	10,317 (0.4)	5,680 (0.3)	+6,821	120.1

In 2021, Mandarin replaced Italian as the most common language spoken at home other than English, and Punjabi which was not even in the top 20 in 2011, rose significantly in speaker numbers to become the fourth most common language.

The linguistic diversity trends indicate the increasing prominence of Asian language speakers, compared with other language groups, which also supports the emerging trends from recent birthplace data.

**As of 2021, Mandarin has replaced Italian as the most common language spoken other than English, while Punjabi has become the fourth most common language spoken.**

## Comparison across Australia

Compared with WA (18.7%), the proportion of LOTE speakers nationally is larger (22.5%).

The top LOTEs spoken at home in Australia were Mandarin, Arabic, Vietnamese, Cantonese, Punjabi, Greek, Italian, Hindi, Spanish and Nepali. Except for Greek, Hindi and Nepali, the remaining top LOTEs are the same as in WA.

At the national level, Arabic is the second and Italian is the seventh most common language spoken at home. In WA, the ordering of these languages is reversed.

**LOTE is the abbreviation for language/s other than English spoken at home.**

## English language proficiency

To provide accessible services and develop effective communication strategies, it is essential to consider the linguistic diversity of Western Australians and the levels of their English language proficiency. Since there are some residents and new arrivals in WA with low proficiency in English, it is important to remove language related barriers faced by these groups, that often limit their access to services necessary for their successful settlement outcomes and effective participation in society. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of effective multicultural communication strategies to ensure that essential health advice reached all members of our society, including migrant communities and those with low levels of English proficiency.

Self-reported proficiency in spoken English is the measure for assessing the level of English proficiency based on the Australian Population and Housing Census data. Those who reported low level of English proficiency or not speaking English at all are identified as people with low English proficiency.

As a proportion of the total population, the number of Western Australians with low English proficiency became smaller in 2021, comprising 2.2 per cent of the population, from 2.5 per cent in 2016. Of the LOTE speakers, 437,389 (or 88%) reported speaking English very well or well, while 60,115, (12%), had low English proficiency. Overall, the level of low English proficiency has declined since 2011 (from 14.3%). The proportion of LOTE speakers in WA with low English proficiency is also lower than the national average (15.1%).

However, the level of English language proficiency varies by age, gender and language spoken at home, among other factors. For example, language proficiency is lower for older people,

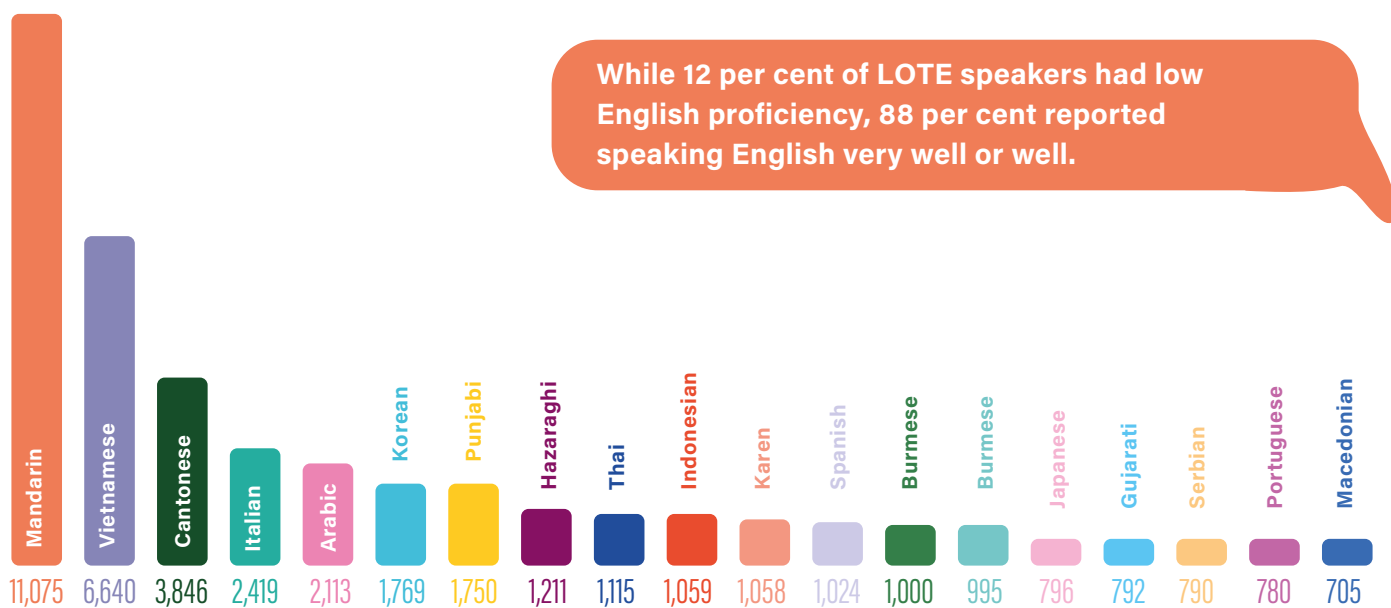
especially women. Among LOTE speakers aged 65 years and over, 32.7 per cent of women reported low English proficiency, compared with 25.2 per cent of their male counterparts.

Languages with a larger number (700 or more) of speakers who reported low English proficiency include **Mandarin, Vietnamese, Cantonese,**

**Italian, Arabic, Korean, Punjabi, Hazaraghi, Thai and Indonesian** (Figure 2.3).

Except for Hazaraghi, Karen and Dari, all 18 languages are among the top 30 commonly spoken languages (LOTEs) in WA. (Figure 2.3)

**Figure 2.3: Languages with a larger number of speakers with low English proficiency (700+), 2021**



It is important to note the languages that have a high number of speakers with low English language proficiency for effective planning and delivery of services. However, it is equally essential to be aware of the languages where there are a high proportion of speakers with low proficiency in English. Often many of these languages are spoken by a relatively small number of new and emerging groups of migrants who have arrived in WA as refugees and asylum seekers from South-East Asia, Africa and the Middle East.

These languages include (in descending order): **Chin Haka, Karen, Hazaraghi, Vietnamese, Khmer, Korean, Auslan, Kirundi, Mandarin and Dari** (Figure 2.4). For example, Chin Haka was spoken by 796 Western Australians of which 340 speakers reported low English proficiency



**Figure 2.4: Languages with 15 per cent or more speakers (300+) with low English proficiency, 2021**

It is therefore important to consider languages with both large numbers and proportions of low English proficiency speakers when identifying key languages for translating and interpreting purposes. Consideration of the above factors helps reach the most vulnerable groups and communities.

## Comparison across Australia

Nationally, the top 10 languages with the highest proportion of speakers with low English proficiency were Khmer, Vietnamese, Hazaraghi, Chaldean Neo-Aramaic, Korean, Assyrian Neo-Aramaic, Mandarin, Burmese, Dari and Cantonese. Although most of the languages with a high proportion of low-English proficiency speakers are comparable to WA, there are some important variations. For example, Chaldean Neo-Aramaic and Assyrian Neo-Aramaic are not among WA's top low-proficiency languages.

Therefore, State specific differences should be considered when developing relevant local multicultural communication strategies.

**It is important to consider languages with both large numbers and large proportions of low-English proficiency speakers to ensure that the most vulnerable groups are reached through effective multicultural communication strategies.**

## Changing religious affiliation

Like the rest of Australia, WA is becoming more religiously diverse. In 2021, for the first time, those identifying with no religion or secular beliefs (1,142,220 or 42.9%), outnumbered those affiliated with Christianity (1,093,666 or 41.1%) (Table 2.6).

The number of people affiliated with non-Christian religions increased for all main groups—Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism. Even Judaism, which recorded a declining trend during the 2011–2016 Census period, has since increased. (Figure 2.5).

Islam became the largest non-Christian faith (2.5%), followed by Buddhism (2.2%), Hinduism (2%), Sikhism (0.7%) and Judaism (0.2%). This trend differs from both 2016 and 2011 when Buddhism was the largest non-Christian religion.

**Like the rest of Australia, WA is becoming more religiously diverse. The number of Western Australians affiliated with the main other religions such as Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and Sikhism is continuing to increase along with those reported having no religion, while the number affiliated with Christianity is declining over time.**

In terms of absolute numbers, the 'no religion or secular beliefs' group grew most rapidly by 570,266 people (99.7%) since 2011. Hinduism remained the fastest growing faith group with an increase of 31,020 people (147.6%), followed by Islam by 27,648 people (70.7%).

During this same period, the number of people affiliated with Christianity decreased by 206,688 or 16 per cent, while those affiliated with Sikhism recorded a significant increase by 13,672 people or 278.4 per cent.

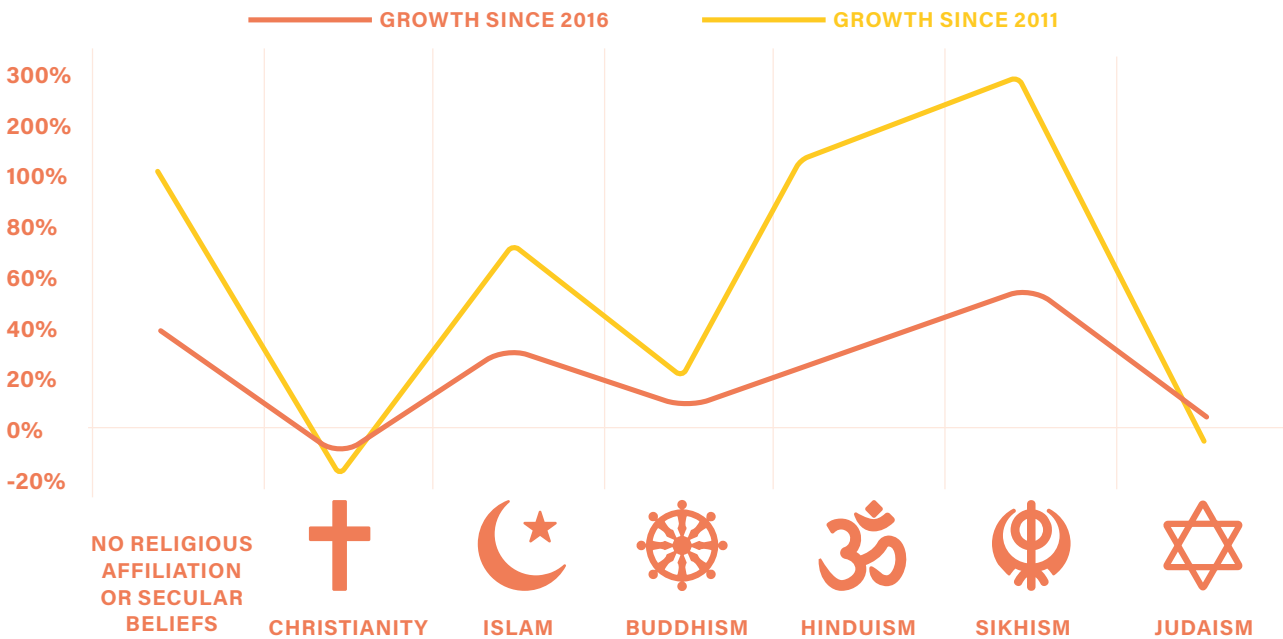


**Table 2.6: Top religious affiliations in WA and growth since 2011**

Religion	2021	2016	2011	Growth 2011- 2021	
	Number (%)	Number (%)	Number (%)	Number	Percentage
<b>No religion*</b>	1,142,220 (42.9)	816,145 (33.0)	571,954 (25.5)	+570,266	99.7
<b>Christianity</b>	1,093,666 (41.1)	1,231,605 (49.8)	1,300,354 (58.1)	- 206,688	-15.9
<b>Islam</b>	66,764 (2.5)	50,650 (2.0)	39,116 (1.7)	+27,648	70.7
<b>Buddhism</b>	57,622 (2.2)	52,833 (2.1)	47,396 (2.1)	+10,226	21.6
<b>Hinduism</b>	52,055 (2.0)	38,741 (1.6)	21,026 (0.9)	+31,029	147.6
<b>Sikhism</b>	18,583 (0.7)	11,902 (0.4)	4,911 (0.2)	+13,672	278.4
<b>Judaism</b>	5,669 (0.2)	5,425 (0.2)	5,853 (0.3)	- 184	-3.1

\*Note: No religion refers to secular beliefs and other spiritual beliefs and no religious affiliation.

**Figure 2.5: Growth of most common religious groups since 2011**



### Comparison across Australia

Religious affiliation data shows notable differences in the ranking of common religions for Australia and WA. Nationally, Christianity remained the most common religion (43.9%), followed by those with no religious affiliation or secular beliefs (38.9%), Islam (3.2%), Hinduism (2.7%), Buddhism (2.4%) and Sikhism (0.8%).

In 2021, a larger proportion (10%) of Australians reported an affiliation with the main other religions, compared with that for WA (8%).





# SECTION 3

Cultural diversity at the local level

# Local Government Areas

Local government is often considered as the arm of government, with which community groups and residents engage most. Being closest to communities, they play a significant role in influencing socioeconomic wellbeing of people in their locality. Therefore, understanding the cultural diversity landscape at the local level is essential.

## Measuring cultural diversity at the local level

Similar to the State level, the prerequisite for measuring the depth and breadth of cultural diversity at a local level is to highlight the multiple dimensions that characterise diversity within local government areas. These include indicators such as birthplace, language spoken at home, ancestry and religious affiliation.

## The top culturally and linguistically diverse Local Government Areas (LGAs)

Residents in metropolitan areas were more likely to be born overseas (36%), compared with regional areas of WA (18%), see Table 3.1. One in every five people in metropolitan LGAs originated from NMES birthplaces, almost three times larger than the regional average (7%), and slightly higher than the State average (17.5%). Similarly, the average figure for LOTE speakers was 22 per cent for metropolitan areas, higher than corresponding figures for regional areas (9%) or the State (18.7%).

Based on the data and indicators noted in the matrix Table 3.1, the top 10 metropolitan and top five regional LGAs that were noted as the most culturally diverse<sup>15</sup> were:

- **Metropolitan LGAs** (in descending order)  
Canning, Perth, Gosnells, Belmont, Bayswater, Victoria Park, Stirling, South Perth, Armadale, Melville
- **Regional LGAs** (in descending order)  
Katanning, Carnarvon, Kalgoorlie-Boulder, Gingin and Port Hedland.

## Cultural diversity matrix

In order to understand the level of cultural diversity within LGAs fully, it is essential to examine each cultural and linguistic indicator in relation to the total population of each LGA. Accordingly, Table 3.1 below provides the depth and breadth of cultural diversity by showing all LGAs with a minimum of 500 or more people comprising approximately 10 per cent or more of the local population born overseas, mainly in NMES birthplaces and speaking LOTE at home.<sup>16</sup>

Affiliation with non-Christian religions is shown in the last column of the matrix Table 3.1 but is not used as a measure of cultural diversity for an LGA. This is because there were significant proportions of people from CaLD backgrounds who were affiliated with both Christianity (around 45%) and non-Christian (more than 30%) religions. The corresponding WA averages are lower (41.1% and 8%, respectively).

**There is much larger concentration of people from CaLD backgrounds residing in the Perth Metropolitan LGAs (91%), compared with regional LGAs (9%). The corresponding State figures are higher for regional (21%) and lower for metropolitan LGAs (79%).**

**Table 3.1: Cultural diversity matrix at Local Government level, 2021**

Top Metropolitan LGAs	Population	Overseas born	Rank	NMES birthplaces	Rank	LOTE speakers	Rank	Non-Christian Religion
Canning	95,860	50.8%	2	41.4%	1	43.1%	1	22.9%
Perth	28,463	54.0%	1	41.2%	2	37.9%	2	14.5%
Gosnells	126,376	43.7%	3	32.7%	3	36.0%	3	21.8%
Belmont	42,257	40.8%	4	30.1%	4	31.2%	4	16.3%
Bayswater	69,283	37.7%	5	26.6%	5	27.5%	6	11.4%
Victoria Park	36,889	37.5%	7	25.7%	6	24.7%	7	11.5%
Stirling	226,369	37.6%	6	25.5%	7	27.8%	5	12.9%
South Perth	43,405	34.7%	10	22.2%	8	20.7%	13	8.5%
Armadale	94,184	36.0%	8	21.6%	9	23.8%	8	12.6%
Melville	103,523	34.4%	12	21.5%	10	20.6%	14	6.7%
Swan	152,974	33.5%	14	20.8%	11	23.6%	9	11.8%
Cockburn	118,091	34.1%	13	20.4%	12	21.9%	10	5.9%
Kwinana	45,867	34.6%	11	20.2%	13	21.6%	11	8.4%
Vincent	36,537	32.8%	13	19.7%	14	20.1%	15	6.3%
Subiaco	17,267	34.9%	9	19.1%	15	17.6%	16	5.8%
Nedlands	22,132	32.8%	15	18.5%	16	15.7%	17	5.4%
Wanneroo	209,111	40.7%	4	17.7%	17	21.1%	12	8.9%
Mosman Park	9,169	32.1%	16	16.1%	18	14.2%	19	5.3%
Cambridge	28,876	30.5%	18	15.6%	19	14.9%	18	4.6%
Claremont	11,284	31.3%	17	14.9%	20	12.7%	23	4.0%
Bassendean	15,932	27.2%	14	14.3%	21	14.1%	20	5.0%
Fremantle	31,930	29.1%	19	13.1%	22	13.0%	21	3.0%
Kalamunda	58,762	28.5%	20	12.9%	23	12.8%	22	5.7%
Joondalup	160,003	37.0%	6	11.5%	24	11.1%	15	3.4%
Serpentine-Jarrahdale	32,173	25.1%	21	9.7%	25	11.1%	24	5.5%
<b>Total Perth metropolitan</b>	2,099,252	36.0%	7	20.3	13	21.6%	11	9.4%
<b>Top Regional Areas</b>								
Katanning	4,057	21.0%	4	13.5%	1	20.0%	2	16.2%
Carnarvon	5,251	18.4%	7	12.0%	2	12.9%	6	4.2%
Kalgoorlie-Boulder	29,306	23.8%	2	11.6%	3	13.4%	4	3.8%
Gingin	5,576	25.4%	1	10.9%	4	9.3%	7	2.3%
Port Hedland	15,684	20.5%	5	10.8%	5	15.6%	3	6.7%
East Pilbara	9,760	21.6%	3	10.3%	6	21.4%	1	5.2%
Karratha	22,199	18.6%	6	9.5%	7	13.0%	5	4.7%
<b>Total WA regional</b>	560,775	17.7%	9	7.0	7	9.0	8	2.5%

Note: Rankings are provided for the metropolitan and regional LGAs by noting the highest average figures for each of the indicators. Even fractions are used in this process for clarity and the ease of understanding. The list of LGAs is arranged in descending order by the highest average figures for NMES birthplace.



## Conclusion

This report has provided an analysis of the Census data between 2011 and 2021 highlighting the changing population, dynamics of migration, and growing cultural and linguistic diversity of the State and the LGAs.

This analysis of the demographic, cultural, ethnic and linguistic tapestry of the Western Australian population provides valuable information and insights necessary for planning culturally responsive and appropriate programs and policy measures for sustainable development as envisaged in the WA Multicultural Policy Framework.

During the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020–21, as the Commonwealth, State and local governments strived to share essential messaging and resources for their communities, the need to better understand the makeup of our communities came to the forefront of many multicultural communication strategies. It highlighted the differing population groups in various States, the cultural diversity of local areas in WA, and the importance of reaching vulnerable communities to ensure they were safe and protected. The data related to languages other than English spoken by WA residents and also the English proficiency levels of various communities was fundamental to developing effective communication strategies.

Understanding the needs of our community better helps create responsive and equitable policy, services and program delivery, ensuring that all residents can participate, contribute and feel safe, irrespective of their backgrounds.

# Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Australia is among the top 10 countries of the world with the highest number and proportion of migrants (<https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/immigration-by-country>)

<sup>2</sup>Following the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) classification, main English-speaking birthplaces include Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the United States of America. Although Australia is also included in this group, it was shown separately for better cross-sectional comparison used in this report. All the remaining birthplaces are classified as non-main English-speaking birthplaces.

<sup>3</sup>See for example, Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022, September 20). Cultural diversity of Australia. ABS. <https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/cultural-diversity-australia>.

<sup>4</sup>Discussed and shown (Table 2.1) in the next Section.

<sup>5</sup>"Demographic delays: How closed borders will impact the future demand for services." Available from <https://content.id.com.au/demographic-delays-how-closed-borders-will-impact-the-future-demand-for-services>

<sup>6</sup>Please refer to Wilding and Tilbury (eds.) (2004). *A changing people: Diverse Contributions to the State of Western Australia*. Perth, Western Australia: Department of the Premier and Cabinet, Office of Multicultural Interests, particularly Introduction chapter by Appleyard and Baldassar (pp.8-32); <https://www.naa.gov.au/learn/learning-resources/learning-resource-themes/society-and-culture/migration-and-multiculturalism/populate-or-perish-australias-postwar-migration-program>

<sup>7</sup>Appleyard and Baldassar (2004). Op.Cit: 21

<sup>8</sup>By far the largest number of Jewish immigrants, mostly the survivors of the Holocaust arrived after World War II mainly from Europe and Shanghai. However, in WA, the displaced persons mainly arrived from the then Czechoslovakia, Poland and Baltic countries. Please refer to <https://newsroom.unsw.edu.au/news/social-affairs/holocaust-through-lens-australian-jewish-refugees>; Appleyard and Baldassar (2004). Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>See for example: Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022, September 20). Op.Cit.

<sup>10</sup>Given that ABS allows up to two responses for ancestry, hence, the proportion is derived against total responses which is always greater than total population.

<sup>11</sup>Please see FECCA (2020) 'If we don't count it... it doesn't count!: towards consistent national data collection and reporting on cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity' - external site opens in new window, Federation of Ethnic Communities' Council of Australia, Australian Government.

<sup>12</sup>This excludes an Australian and Australian Aboriginal ancestry response along with 'Not stated' category.

<sup>13</sup>Please note that this estimate is derived from ANC1P data from TableBuilder program, which is based on the first ancestry response of the resident Western Australians, while the rest of the ancestry data used in this report is from ANCP or multiple responses meaning up to two responses. To avoid the risk of double counting or duplications, ANC1P data is used to combine Indian ancestry response.

<sup>14</sup>For a detailed discussion of the limitations of cultural diversity data used by ABS, please refer to Stevens and Fozdar 2021. 'Ethnicity, race or nation? Census classifications as barriers to the measurement of mixedness in Australia.' *Australian Population Studies*, 5 (1): 49-55

<sup>15</sup>It should be noted that with 43.6% of the local population born overseas, 38.5% migrated from NMES birthplaces and 44.5% speaking LOTE at home, Christmas Island had the highest ranking for each of the cultural diversity markers. However, given its special status by virtue of which no State-level of government but the Commonwealth Government is responsible for the provision of State-type laws and services to the territory, it was not included in this Table (please see <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/territories-regions-cities/territories/indian-ocean-territories/christmas-island/governance-administration>).

<sup>16</sup>Given the multiple responses and complexity involved in using ancestry-based data for measuring cultural diversity for a large number of LGAs, it was not used for the matrix table.



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