



Government of **Western Australia**  
Department of **Local Government**  
Office of **Multicultural Interests**

# Media Guide for Multicultural Western Australia



This guide has been prepared by the Office of Multicultural Interests as a reference tool for the media, providing useful guidance to enhance understanding of Western Australia's culturally and linguistically diverse population.

**November 2011**

# Reporting on cultural diversity

**The media plays an important role in shaping public attitudes on multiculturalism and related issues through its reporting and representation of ethnic groups and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.**

This guide has been prepared by the Office of Multicultural Interests and is designed to be a reference tool for the media, providing useful guidance to enhance understanding of Western Australia's culturally and linguistically diverse population.

## Cultural diversity—it's good for business

Cultural diversity is an international, economic, social and cultural asset for WA. Diversity of skills and talent, for instance, is the key to a productive workforce and a dynamic economy. The media can play an important role in highlighting the benefits that businesses and the State derive from the knowledge and networks of the overseas-born workforce in WA. From mining to medical research, every sector of the economy has been enriched by the skills and acumen of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

## Issues to consider

### CULTURES ARE NOT HOMOGENOUS

There can be vast cultural, linguistic and religious diversity within communities. For example, there are 53 African countries on the African continent, and around the same number of countries are loosely defined as part of Asia. Obviously, all Africans do not share the same culture, languages, views or values, just as all Asian people do not. Your reporting will be strengthened by this understanding.

### USE OF MULTICULTURAL TALENT

Representatives from ethnic communities can be quoted on matters other than multicultural issues. Balanced reporting requires accessing a range of views that are truly representative of our diverse population.

### STEREOTYPES

Racial and ethnic stereotyping conveys attributes or characteristics of certain groups and individuals in simplistic and often negative terms and can be misleading to the public. It's important not to perpetuate stereotypes in stories by mentioning race or ethnicity where it's not relevant. For example, it would be incorrect to describe a group of Australian citizens of Lebanese descent as "a group of Lebanese men".

### CRIME AND ETHNICITY

The link between ethnicity and crime is tenuous and often misleading. Research nationally and internationally indicates that race, ethnicity and country of origin have less to do with crime than socioeconomic disadvantage and the environment of alleged criminals.<sup>1</sup>

The term 'gang', for instance, can be used to cover any group and any kind of activity engaged in by people. However, the word 'gang' is often associated with criminal activity. Academic work in this area has highlighted the importance of distinguishing between 'youth group formations' (friendship networks, sub-cultural affiliations and family ties) and 'youth gangs' (structured and organised groups), and between 'social-centred' activities (such as sharing similar language, religious beliefs, musical interests) and criminal-centred

<sup>1</sup> 'Ethnicity and Crime' by Satyanshu Mukherjee in Australian Institute of Criminology, *Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice*, No 117, May 1999



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activities (committing offences).<sup>2</sup> The reality is that most young people (and specifically young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds) aren't involved in gangs and are merely 'hanging out' in groups as young people have always done.

Reporting on crime should focus on the physical characteristics of offenders rather than ethnicity or community membership.

For these reasons, using the word 'gangs' to describe groups of people from ethnic backgrounds congregating together, risks criminalising a whole community.

## **WHICH GROUP IS BEING REPRESENTED?**

There is often more than one leader, spokesperson or representative body for particular religious, ethnic or Indigenous communities. When using comments from an ethnic or religious community spokesperson, be aware of which group they are representing as views and beliefs may vary within these communities.

## **CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICES**

Respecting the role of religion in various cultures is part of courteous, ethical and professional behaviour.

For some adherents to Buddhism, Judaism and Islam, it may not be appropriate to be alone with or have physical contact (such as shaking hands) with a member of the opposite sex, while others within these faith groups are often flexible about greetings and physical contact. If you are unsure when meeting with a spokesperson, it's always advisable to ask them.

Due to religious or cultural reasons, some members of the community often prefer not to be photographed. For these reasons you should always request permission before taking photographs.

For further information on cultural and religious practices, see the Office of Multicultural Interests' Culture and Religion Information Sheets at [www.omi.wa.gov.au](http://www.omi.wa.gov.au)

## **BODY LANGUAGE AND BEHAVIOUR**

Be careful not to misread non-verbal behaviour. Non-verbal signals acceptable in one culture, such as direct eye contact or nodding of the head, may be unacceptable, disrespectful or mean something completely different in another culture.

## **PHOTOGRAPHS, CARTOONS AND IMAGES**

Media images have a powerful impact on how we view the world. The use of images or cartoons that stereotype or inaccurately portray people from culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse backgrounds have the potential to mislead, and increase community tensions and discrimination against particular groups.

These images may also be offensive and could breach State or Commonwealth laws relating to racial discrimination (see 'Legal issues').

<sup>2</sup> Contained in 'Multicultural Youth in Australia: Settlement and Transition', Steven Francis and Sarah Cornfoot, Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues for the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, October 2007, from White R, Perrone S, Guerra C, Lampugnani R, *Ethnic Youth Gangs in Australia: Do they Exist?* Report Number 3: Pacific Islander Young People, Melbourne: Australian Multicultural Foundation; 1999.

# Key information

## Facts and figures

The inclusion of data from reliable studies and sources, such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics, adds significant credibility and accuracy to an article or story. The following data from the 2006 Census of Population and Housing provides a snapshot of cultural and linguistic diversity in WA:

- of all Australian States and Territories, WA has the largest proportion of people born overseas, with more than half a million (531,747) people or just over a quarter of the population (27 per cent) born overseas
- people from more than 200 different countries live, work and study in WA
- residents speak as many as 270 languages and identify with more than 100 religious faiths
- almost two-thirds (65.5 per cent) of the State's usual residents indicated they had an ancestry other than Australian
- almost half of the total population of WA (49.2 per cent or 962,892 people) had one or both parents born overseas
- there were 58,711 people (three per cent of the total State population) who identified as being of Indigenous origin.

## Office of Multicultural Interests Strategic Plan

The OMI Strategic Plan 2009–2013 outlines three objectives aimed at ensuring that people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) backgrounds are able to participate fully in social, economic and cultural life:

### Participation

Full participation of CaLD communities in social, economic and cultural life

### Equity

Remove the barriers to equity experienced by CaLD communities

### Promotion

Promote the benefits of Western Australia's cultural and linguistic diversity.

These objectives are implemented in three priority areas identified in the Strategic Plan 2009–2013: the Western Australian public sector, CaLD communities and across Western Australia.

## Multicultural organisations

There are hundreds of groups and organisations that represent WA's ethnic and religious communities. There are also many organisations that provide settlement support and services specifically to people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Contact with the relevant group is vital in ensuring that your story is accurate and reflects community views. For details on how to connect with the right people, see 'Who to contact', below.

### Who to contact?

To obtain contact details for ethnic communities, religious organisations and service providers visit the online version of the 'Directory of Services for New Arrivals' on the OMI website at [www.omi.wa.gov.au](http://www.omi.wa.gov.au) —under 'Resources and publications'.

If you are unsure who to contact within a particular ethnic or religious group, call OMI on 08 6552 1500 for further assistance.

If you'd like more statistics on cultural diversity, visit the OMI website at [www.omi.wa.gov.au](http://www.omi.wa.gov.au) or telephone 08 6552 1500.

# Terminology

**Specific terms have specific meanings, and using the wrong one can mislead or even offend your audience. The following is an explanation of some key terms:**

## **ASYLUM SEEKERS:**

Asylum seekers are people who have applied for recognition as refugees but whose cases have yet to be determined under the Refugee Convention. The majority of asylum seekers arrive in Australia with permission to enter. The Australian Press Council cautions the media in using terms such as ‘illegal asylum seeker’ and ‘illegal refugee’ as they are inaccurate and derogatory.

## **MULTICULTURALISM**

Multiculturalism is about everyone. It acknowledges the cultural, religious and linguistic diversity of Australia’s population and recognises that all members of the community are entitled to participate fully in society.

## **QUEUE JUMPER**

A misleading term that is sometimes used for asylum seekers who arrive in Australia without a valid visa. The term inaccurately implies that people arriving in Australia without a visa have ‘jumped ahead of’ others or gained entry at the expense of others, when in fact no such ‘queue’ for humanitarian entrants exists.

## **RACE**

The term ‘race’ is an artificial construct used to classify people on the basis of supposed physical and cultural similarities deriving from their ancestry. Although there is no scientific evidence to support the existence of human races, people tend to assume that there are racial categories.

Under the Western Australian *Equal Opportunity Act 1984* race includes colour, descent, ethnic or national origin or nationality and may comprise two or more distinct races.

## **REFUGEE**

Australia is a signatory to the United Nations Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, 1951 (Refugee Convention). Australia is obliged to ensure that all those who make claims for protection while in Australia have their claims assessed in accordance with the Refugee Convention.

The terms ‘refugee’ and ‘asylum seeker’ are often confused. A refugee is any person who has left their own country of nationality due to an established fear of being persecuted on the basis of ethnicity, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, and is unable to, or is unwilling to return to it. A refugee is someone who has been assessed by a national government or an international agency (such as the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)) and meets the criteria set out under the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, 1951. A person is a refugee the moment he or she fulfils the criteria of this Convention.

The Office of Multicultural Interests has produced a ‘Working Definition of Terms’. For a full list and explanation of multicultural and Indigenous terminology, visit [www.omi.wa.gov.au](http://www.omi.wa.gov.au)

# Regulations and codes

There are several sources of regulation of journalism in Australia, all of which provide for the fair reporting of diversity. In some cases, the authority of these regulations flows more from professional obligations than legal obligations. The main distinction is between regulation of broadcast media and regulation of print media, although the professional code administered by the Australian Journalists Association (AJA) applies to members of the association in their work across all media.<sup>3</sup>

## The main sources of regulation are:

### Broadcasting

Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA)  
Codes of Practices

### Print media

Australian Press Council—APC Statement of Principles

### Journalists in general

AJA Code of Ethics and Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA)

The AJA's code of ethics describes journalists as being committed to honesty, fairness, independence and respect for the rights of others. The code makes deliberate mention of the fair reporting of diversity:

*Do not to place unnecessary emphasis on personal characteristics, including race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, age, sexual orientation, family relationships, religious belief, or physical or intellectual disability.*

Codes of practice for commercial television, radio and internet also contain provisions against the broadcast of material that may incite hatred against or vilify any person or group or offend the cultural sensitivities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people or ethnic or racial groups in the Australian community. The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) investigates complaints about inappropriate content on broadcasting services.

For details see 'Useful links' on page 8.

<sup>3</sup> Communications Law Centre—[www.comslaw.org.au](http://www.comslaw.org.au)

# Legal issues

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**In addition to Commonwealth and State laws that impact on what you can say about other people and organisations, Australia is subject to international conventions and declarations including racial vilification and discrimination.**

Commonwealth legislation, including the *Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986* and the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*, have provisions that make it unlawful to offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate another person or a group of people because of their race, colour or national or ethnic origin.

In Western Australia, legislation relating to racial vilification includes the *WA Criminal Code Amendment (Racial Vilification Act) 2004* and the *Equal Opportunity Act 1984*.

The Australian Press Council and the Communications Law Centre websites contain information on a number of legal issues including defamation, freedom of the press and privacy. For details see 'Useful links' on page 8.

## What this means for media

- Balanced reports should reflect WA's cultural and linguistic diversity.
- To report accurately, you need to know and use the correct terminology for addressing people and groups from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- Journalists need to understand the State and Commonwealth laws and industry codes of practice covering racial vilification, discrimination and defamation.
- Understanding cultural and religious practices is important.
- Avoid using images, words and descriptions that could stereotype, inaccurately portray or be offensive to Aboriginal people or groups from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

# Useful links

The following website links will assist you in obtaining further information and support on any of the matters in this Media Guide:

- All-Media Guide to Fair and Cross Cultural Reporting: [www.griffith.edu.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0015/32037/all-media-guide.pdf](http://www.griffith.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0015/32037/all-media-guide.pdf)
- Australian Bureau of Statistics: [www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au)
- Australian Journalists Association—Code of Ethics: [www.alliance.org.au/documents/codeofethics.pdf](http://www.alliance.org.au/documents/codeofethics.pdf)
- Australian Press Council: [www.presscouncil.org.au](http://www.presscouncil.org.au)
- Codes of practice for commercial television, radio and internet. Visit the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) website at: [www.acma.gov.au/WEB/STANDARD/pc=IND\\_REG\\_CODES\\_BCAST](http://www.acma.gov.au/WEB/STANDARD/pc=IND_REG_CODES_BCAST)
- Communications Law Centre: [www.comslaw.org.au](http://www.comslaw.org.au)
- Defamation Guide (extract)—Internet: [wiki.apc.org.au/images/d/d6/Defamation-Guide.pdf](http://wiki.apc.org.au/images/d/d6/Defamation-Guide.pdf)
- Department of Indigenous Affairs: [www.dia.wa.gov.au](http://www.dia.wa.gov.au)
- Department of Immigration and Citizenship: [www.immi.gov.au](http://www.immi.gov.au)
- Equal Opportunity Commission and Equal Opportunity Act 1984: [www.equalopportunity.wa.gov.au](http://www.equalopportunity.wa.gov.au)
- Ethnic Communities Council of Western Australia: [www.eccwa.org.au](http://www.eccwa.org.au)
- Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia: <http://www.fecca.org.au/>
- Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (see Face the Facts publication): [www.humanrights.gov.au](http://www.humanrights.gov.au)
- Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA): [www.alliance.org.au/](http://www.alliance.org.au/)
- Media Guide: Islam and Muslims in Australia: [www.islamicwomenswelfare.org.au/files/MediaGuide.pdf](http://www.islamicwomenswelfare.org.au/files/MediaGuide.pdf)
- National Ethnic and Multicultural Broadcasters Council: [www.nembc.org.au](http://www.nembc.org.au)
- Office of Multicultural Interests: [www.omi.wa.gov.au](http://www.omi.wa.gov.au)
- Racism No Way: [www.racismnoway.com.au](http://www.racismnoway.com.au)
- Refugee Council of Australia: [www.refugeecouncil.org.au/](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/)
- Reporting Diversity: How journalists can contribute to community cohesion: [www.societyofeditors.org](http://www.societyofeditors.org)
- Reporting Diversity Project: [www.reportingdiversity.org.au/index.html](http://www.reportingdiversity.org.au/index.html)
- WA Criminal Code Amendment (Racial Vilification) Act 2004: [http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/wa/num\\_act/ccava200480o2004396](http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/wa/num_act/ccava200480o2004396)

## More information

For more information and assistance, please contact:

### OFFICE OF MULTICULTURAL INTERESTS

Department of Local Government

GPO Box R1250 PERTH WA 6844

Phone: (08) 6552 1500 Fax: (08) 6552 1555

Email: [harmony@omi.wa.gov.au](mailto:harmony@omi.wa.gov.au)

Website: [www.omi.wa.gov.au](http://www.omi.wa.gov.au)