

MULTICULTURAL AUSTRALIA

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Introduction

More than 200 years after European settlement, and with some 50 years of immigration, Australia is one of the world's most culturally diverse nations.

Many cultures have contributed to the rich and diverse society which is Australia today. One in every five Australians was born overseas and 50 per cent of those come from a country where English is not the first language.

Together with their Australian-born children, Australians from a non-English speaking backgrounds make up one fifth of the Australian population today.

Aborigines

Prior to European settlement, a vibrant and diverse indigenous culture thrived in Australia.

While the past 200 years have seen dramatic changes to the lives of Aboriginal people, their presence today serves as a reminder that Australia is, for the most part, truly a nation of recent immigrants.

Migrants

Since World War II, Australia has become the home of almost five million people from 130 countries.

The great majority of these people have come from the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland and other countries in Europe. In recent years, new arrivals from Asia, the Middle East and South America have brought about signifi-

cant changes in the make up of the Australian population.

About 14 per cent of Australians older than five years speak a language other than English at home.

The most common language is Italian, followed by Greek, Chinese, German, Arabic/Lebanese and Spanish.

Religions

There is also a wide range of religions represented in Australia. While the majority of Australians are Christians of various denominations, a growing number of Australians adhere to faiths such as Islam and Buddhism.

Nearly two million Australians do not belong to any religion.

Economic impact

Migration has made an enormous economic and social contribution to Australia. It has brought expertise, innovation and skills in a number of areas in which Australia has established an international reputation.

People who have come to live in Australia over the last 50 years now rank among the nation's most successful leaders in business, industry, research and the professions.

Australian exporters benefit from the country's cultural and linguistic diversity. Australia's workforce today includes people with a knowledge of a considerable range of potential markets which can be put to very effective use

when competing internationally.

And domestically, the contribution made by immigrants to the growth and sophistication of the Australian economy is huge.

Social impact

Socially, Australia has been transformed into one of the most vibrant and dynamic societies in the world.

The range of restaurants, fashion, art and architecture are features that highlight Australia's cultural diversity and provide an additional dimension for the country's tourism industry.

Source: DFAT