

## **Our Community **Multicultural Snapshot:** A Report on Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Albury-Wodonga.**

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### **Introduction**

The Albury-Wodonga Ethnic Communities Council (AWECC) is the peak advocacy body for local, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) residents. As a community, not-for-profit organisation, AWECC advocates alongside CALD communities, ensuring their needs and ambitions are made known to all tiers of government, the business sector, and the wider community.

This report provides an update on AWECC's progress towards a viable, vital community asset. The report also presents a 'snapshot' of the ethnic and cultural diversity in today's Albury-Wodonga and explores key findings of the latest census data. The report also suggests several practical recommendations for local decision makers.

In undertaking research for this report, we have taken a regional perspective, appropriate to the *Two Cities One Community Strategic Plan*, combining data for the Cities of Albury and Wodonga (unless otherwise noted). This regional perspective also aligns with AWECC's cross-border, 'one community' approach to advocacy and service delivery.

### **AWECC: A Vital Community Asset**

Since its establishment in 2014, AWECC has become an active community advocate and information hub for residents from migrant and refugee backgrounds. Starting as a Victorian State funded Wodonga Council project (with just one part-time project worker and 12 individual members from CALD communities), AWECC now employs three staff (part-time) and represents ten, ethnic communities and over 50 individual members, from CALD communities.

Today, with its involvement in the four-year, \$920,000 *Ovens & Murray Multicultural Regional Area Partnership* (OMMRAP), in partnership with North East Multicultural Association (NEMA), Gateway Health, Wodonga Council and the Rural City of Wangaratta, AWECC is delivering various programs and services from its office and community hub at Gateway Health, and from its pop-up office locations in Thurgoona and Lavington. AWECC is well positioned to deliver greater community outcomes, both sides of the border. AWECC's ambitions are clear. To be the multicultural voice.

- ❖ **Its vision** is of an inclusive, harmonious Albury-Wodonga community, where everyone belongs.
- ❖ **Its mission** is to advocate for the needs of its constituents, to celebrate ethnic and cultural diversity, and empower members through active involvement, capacity building initiatives, and genuine partnerships.

## **Our Diverse Community**

With a combined population of almost 100,000, the twin cities of Albury-Wodonga are now placed in the top 20 largest cities in Australia. Albury-Wodonga's population has grown at a rate of 7% in five years; (+10% growth in Wodonga alone since 2011). With its city vibe, city-like services, and its convenient location between Melbourne and Sydney, it's an attractive destination for many new residents.

Data from the most recent national Census, undertaken on 9<sup>th</sup> August 2016, reveals interesting and useful information about the makeup of our community. The data confirms what we all knew; that we have a rich migrant past. It also provides evidence for what many have suspected; that our community is indeed growing *and* diversifying.

Migration to our area is not new. Albury-Wodonga has a long and proud history of welcoming migrants and refugees. Following World War II, Bonegilla Migrant Reception and Training Centre saw over 300,000, mostly non-English speaking European refugees, pass through its doors between 1947 and 1971. In more recent times, Wodonga hosted a few hundred displaced Kosovar Albanian's who were offered Temporary Safe-Haven Visas in 1999. More can be read here <http://www.bonegilla.org.au/>

In the last decade, a broader diversity of ethnic communities has integrated into our community. Since 2007 more than 3,250 people have settled in Albury-Wodonga on permanent (or provisional) visas alone, not accounting for the number of residents who have arrived on temporary visa's or as overseas students. A successful Skilled Migration and Humanitarian Settlement Programs, as well as family reunification and secondary migration to our region, have all played their part in the surge.

Local Government also plays an important role in welcoming and supporting refugees and migrants. The positive impact of the declarations made by both AlburyCity and Wodonga Council as *Refugee Welcome Zones* shouldn't be underestimated. AWECC at this point, would also like to acknowledge the support it has received from both council's, through their respective *Community Cultural Grants* and *Community Impact Grants*.

## **The Census Data**

### **Overseas-born residents – (see Appendix 1)**

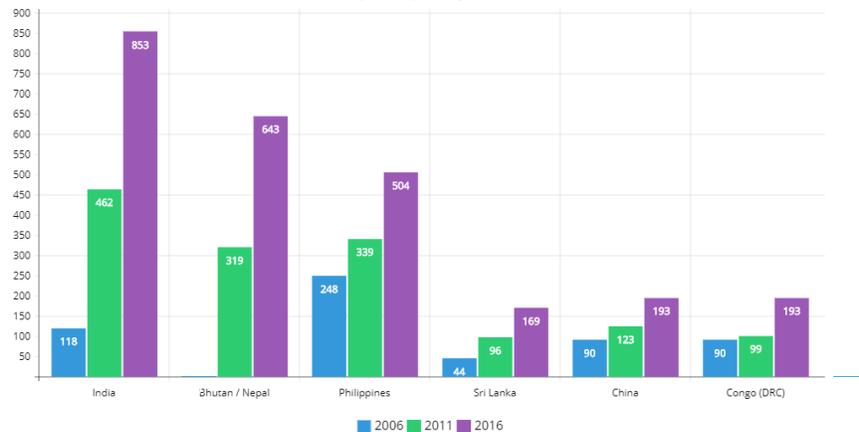
- More than one in 10 residents (10.5%) were born overseas; up from 9.5% in 2011.
- Overseas-born residents living in our cities came from more than 75 different countries.
- 6.6% of the cities' population were born in non-English speaking countries.
- The number of residents from a non-English speaking background increased by 2,119 (55.5%);
- Almost one in four residents (22.5%) have at least one parent born overseas;
- Around 2,000 residents are from refugee backgrounds, with the majority settling in the last five years;
- The three largest countries of birth by population in 2016 were the UK with 2121, and India and New Zealand both with 853.

## Emerging (and declining) population groups

- The six fastest growing population groups are from non-English speaking countries;
- India is the fastest growing country of birth, growing sevenfold since 2006;
- Philippine growth has also been strong at 103% since 2006;
- At the 2006 Census, there were nil residents from Bhutanese / Nepalese country of birth. Since the beginning of the Bhutanese refugee resettlement program in 2008, the number topped 643 in 2016;
- The number of people born in European and Balkan countries have mostly declined or stagnated since 2011; this is likely due to the ageing demographics of those communities;
- Residents born in the UK and Germany, recorded net population losses of -109 and -62 respectively, since 2011; and
- Whilst the number of Congo (DRC) born residents only represents a small percentage of the community (around 0.1%), it's the rapid growth over five years of our Congolese community that is of interest\* (See 'discussion').

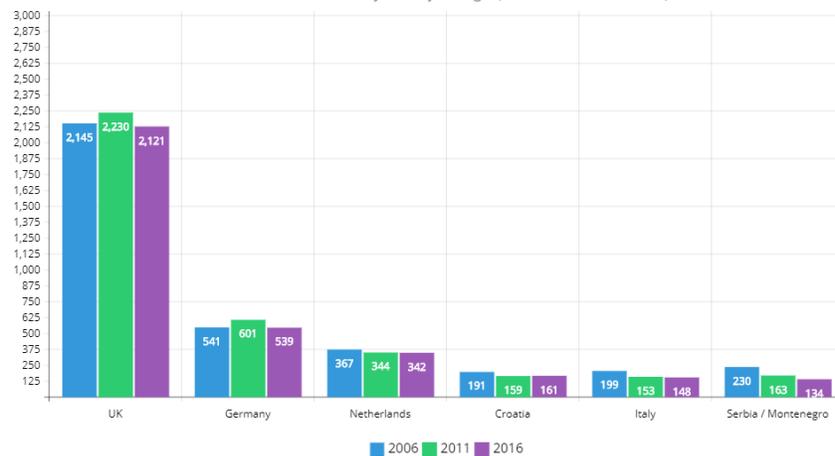
### Overseas born - growing population groups

Number of residents by country of origin (excludes Australian born)



### Overseas born - negative population growth

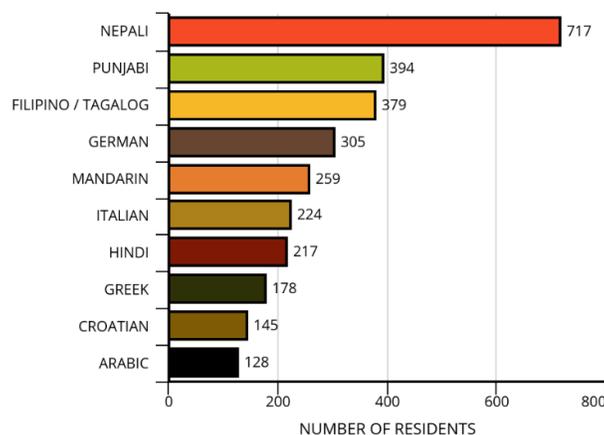
Number of residents by country of origin (excludes Australian born)



## Languages and English proficiency

- More than 55 languages are spoken in homes across Albury-Wodonga;
- A language, other than English, is spoken in around 6.6% of households;
- 5.5% of residents who spoke another language in the home, speaks English well or very well;
- 1% speak English not well, or not at all.
- There has been a significant increase in residents who ‘speaks English only’ or ‘speaks another language, and English well or very well’ (an increase of +7,501 persons between 2006 and 2016).
- Residents who ‘speaks another language *and* English not well or not at all’ has also increased (+667).
- The main language, other than English, spoken in Albury-Wodonga homes is Nepali (717 residents).

Top 10 Languages Other than English,  
Spoken at Home



## Religion

- 61.4% of the Albury-Wodonga population identified as religious in 2016; Religious affiliation is higher in Albury by percentage, than the Regional NSW average.
- 29.4% of the population identified as having no religion;
- Since 2011, there has been significant changes in religious affiliation, with Western Catholic, Anglican, and the Uniting Church registering a combined net loss of -3,620 adherents;
- Hinduism and Buddhism both recorded gains in affiliation, where analysed in conjunction with country of birth, reflects the population growth of residents born in countries from South East Asia and the Indian subcontinent;
- Christian (not further defined) and Pentecostal were the only other major categories of religion which recorded an increase in affiliation.

## Discussion

Data shows that Albury-Wodonga's population is growing, and its population mix is becoming more diverse. Overseas born residents come from more than 75 countries, speaking over 55 different languages. Of those residents migrating to Albury-Wodonga, the majority come from non-English speaking countries, compared to those coming from English speaking countries.

The data also reveals an emergence of several population groups (mainly Indian, Bhutanese/Nepalese, and Filipino), and stagnation in growth of others (i.e. British, Croatian and Serbian). Interestingly, one in a hundred Albury-Wodonga residents were born in India. The number of people in our community who have Indian ancestry (e.g. being born in or having at least one India-born parent) could be perhaps as high as 2-3% of the population. This is consistent with anecdotal evidence suggesting as many as 3000 people of Indian heritage proud call Albury-Wodonga home.

This growth is also true of residents with Bhutanese ancestry. Over a thousand of these residents now call Albury-Wodonga home. (*Note: for this report, residents born in either Nepal or Bhutan have been combined. The great majority (not all) of Nepalese residents were born to Bhutanese parents, or are of Bhutanese heritage; and, many (but not all) had lived in Nepalese refugee camps before being settled in Australia.*)

As indicated previously, the number of residents born in the Democratic Republic of Congo (RDC) has increased steadily over five years to 2016. This growth is attributed to the emergence in this cohort being settled in Albury-Wodonga through the Australian Government's humanitarian settlement program. Many have also come through the *Women at Risk* visa subclass, under that same program. Although the number is still quite small (less than 200 in 2016), this cohort has unique and specific settlement needs and support requirements, as many (not all) arrive in large family groups, often as single mothers with children, or as unaccompanied children. The community support needed (not only for the Congolese cohort, but also for other refugee and migrant settlers), includes such provisions as affordable and suitable housing, driving education programs, community orientation support, and transition programs into the Australian education and employment 'systems'.

It is also important to note what the data might be telling us about language diversity. Interestingly, the number of residents who speaks 'English only' at home (which is still a great majority) or speaks another language *and* speaks English 'very well or well' has risen by several thousand. What this trend might tell us is that formal English language programs, such as the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) — are working. However, considering the growth in numbers of those who 'speaks another language, *and* English not well or not at all' has also risen by several hundred people. It is very likely that the demand on programs (currently delivered through several schools, TAFE's and community colleges), will continue to grow; therefore, the need for increased support and invest into such programs is required.

While religious affiliation overall is in decline and has been for the past several Census surveys. religious diversity is expanding (albeit at a slow rate). It is important that community planners are aware of the trends. Whilst the population moves (increasingly) away from traditional religious affiliations (such as Anglicanism and Western Catholicism), growth in affiliation with Hinduism and Buddhism is growing.

## Recommendations

As our community grows and becomes even more diverse, it is imperative that the (relatively) large number of culturally and linguistically diverse residents is recognised, and that these community members have the opportunities, and the social infrastructure, to support full participation in our community. This includes economic and social participation, and political and legal representation.

We seek continued partnership with culturally and linguistically diverse residents from our local governments. We suggest several ways this can be achieved:

1. That representatives of our local councils (elected representatives and staff) continue an open and meaningful dialogue with Albury-Wodonga Ethnic Communities Council on matters that are important to ethnic and migrant minorities,
2. That council will support greater economic, social and civic contributions of migrants and refugees, by ensuring appropriate policies are in place at both a community level (i.e. multicultural settlement strategies) and within council itself (i.e. use of interpreters, diversity policies etc.);
3. That councils continues and strengthen support for community-level projects and initiatives that promote participation, recognition and social cohesion. We note with gratitude, the support that both councils have given towards several projects and events through grant funding and staff support, e.g. *Refugee Week* and *Harmony Day* celebrations. We do, however, believe more should and can be done. The share of investment (fiscally and in-kind), and due diligence towards CALD community needs, could be more equitably distributed, given the growth of ethnic diversity in the community; and
4. Lastly, the recent Scanlon Foundation's *Mapping Social Cohesion Report* notes there is firm support for multiculturalism in Australia, with the majority of Australian's agreeing that multiculturalism is our strength. However, the report also reveals a worrying trend towards a society that is less tolerant and more nervous about immigration. While the incidences of racism and discrimination are not well understood, or are rarely documented in our community, we know that experiences of such do exist in our community. We are confident however, in our belief that most of our wider community accepts and embraces our migrant history, and our cultural diversity today. This comes as no accident though, it requires deliberate intent. We ask that our local councils continue to demonstrate leadership against discrimination and racism and promote genuine inclusion and participation. In addition to what has already been recommended, we encourage both councils to publicly support human-rights based initiatives, such as the [Welcoming Cities](#) network, [Racism. It Stops with Me](#) campaign and support the annual [Walk Together](#) Albury Wodonga event.

### Sources:

1. <http://www.abs.gov.au/census>
2. <http://www.alburywodonga.gov.au/>
3. Mapping Social Cohesion: The Scanlon Foundation surveys 2017
4. [profile.id.com.au](http://profile.id.com.au)
5. Australian Government, Department of Social Services (2017)
6. <http://www.bonegilla.org.au/about-us/migration-in-australia.asp>

## Appendix 1

### Overseas born (top 10)

Number of residents by country of origin (excludes Australian born)

