

Fact Sheet

Cultural Diversity - Terminology

AVERT
FAMILY VIOLENCE



**Collaborative Responses in
the Family Law System**



An Australian Government Initiative

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Fact Sheet: Cultural Diversity - Terminology

Summary

There are a range of terms that are used when working with diverse communities. There can be a great deal of confusion resulting from the interaction and overlap of the differing terminology. Below are some key terms and their meaning.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the first peoples of Australia. Old definitions based on skin colour or 'percentages of Aboriginal blood' have been replaced by modern definitions which stress ancestry and identification as the key to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity.

Today, the federal government defines an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person as someone who:

- Is of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent
- Identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person
- Is accepted as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person by the community in which he or she lives.

Aboriginal peoples comprise diverse Aboriginal nations, many with their own languages and traditions that have historically lived on mainland Australia, Tasmania or on many of the continent's offshore islands. Torres Strait Islander peoples come from the islands of the Torres Strait, between the tip of Cape York in Queensland and Papua New Guinea. The peoples of the Torres Strait have their own distinct identity, history and cultural traditions. Many Torres Strait Islanders live on mainland Australia.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples retain distinct cultural identities whether they live in urban, regional or remote areas of Australia.



Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Background

At a meeting of the Ministerial Council of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs in 1996, Commonwealth and State Ministers noted problems associated with the use of the term 'NESB' (non-English speaking background) and agreed that "the term be dropped where possible, from all official communication". Since then, Commonwealth agencies have sought to insert the words 'Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds' (CALD).

There are differing views as to what constitutes a CALD background. The distinguishing features could include, but are not limited to:

- Country of origin
- Languages spoken at home
- Family ties
- Cultural and religious background
- Self identification.

Non-English Speaking Background

There is very little agreement about the definition of 'NESB'. The first major use of the word focuses on language: first language spoken, or preferred language, or language spoken at home. The second major definition uses country of birth as an indicator of cultural background and includes within 'NESB' those countries where English is not the main language spoken.

Ethnic Group

Ethnic group refers to a group of people of the same descent and heritage who share a common and distinctive culture passed on through generations. Ethnic groups can exhibit such distinguishing features as language or accent, physical features, family names and customs.



Migrant

A Migrant is someone who **chooses** to leave their own home to live in another country. Most migrants accepted by the Australian Government are granted permanent residency status on arrival in Australia. Migrants can safely return to their country of origin if they choose to do so.

Refugee

A refugee is an asylum seeker who has been accepted by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), or a friendly country, as a refugee. A refugee cannot go home because they fear persecution. Some countries provide refuge until it is safe for them to return home. Others allow them to stay permanently if they wish.

Asylum Seeker

An Asylum Seeker is someone who has had to flee their own country because they are in danger and their own government will not protect them. Some of the reasons for this lack of protection can be because of their religion, their ethnic group or for political reasons.

New and Emerging Communities

'New and emerging communities' refers to those communities who have settled in Australia only in the last 5 years. This group consists mainly of Humanitarian entrants.

The following are some general characteristics of new and emerging communities in Australia with most communities having some, but not all of these characteristics:

- Communities are small in number (ranging from approximately 100 - or even less - up to approximately 8,000)
- Members of these communities are geographically dispersed throughout the major Australian cities and are often highly mobile
- Community members are generally newly arrived (within the last five to ten years) and often have arrived under the Refugee and Humanitarian Program



- Members have little or no familiarity with Australian welfare systems or services
- There is a lack of sustainable community structures, or the community is in the early stages of developing such structures - which is often due to the proportion of new arrivals who are at a 'survival level' creating difficulties in being involved in community development activities
- The composition of the community is diverse (in relation to such things as religion, politics, ethnicity, educational level). The diversity appears more evident due to the small size of the community than within larger communities (which may be equally diverse)
- Communities lack extended family members (and therefore support) and community elders/religious leaders
- The focus of the community organisations may be cultural, religious or political with a lower priority on settlement and welfare issues, particularly in the early stages of settlement.

Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism is a policy designed to manage, foster and celebrate cultural diversity. It recognises the diversity of cultures within the context of a society that not only respects its members' rights to their culture, faith and identity, but also increases their range of choices as well as contributing to their development and well-being.

This is achieved through equal citizenship, a sense of belonging and tackling material disadvantage among people from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background.

The People of Australia Statement - Australian Multicultural Advisory Council (AMAC)

http://www.immi.gov.au/about/stakeholder-engagement/_pdf/people-of-australia.pdf



The Diverse Australia Program

The Diverse Australia Program was announced by the Federal Government in January 2009. The program is a major component of the Government's approach to cultural diversity. It is primarily a community-based educational initiative for all Australians and aims to address issues of cultural, racial and religious intolerance by promoting respect, fairness, inclusion and a sense of belonging for everyone.

The key objectives are:

- The importance of **all Australians respecting one another** regardless of cultural, racial or religious differences
- The **fair treatment of all Australians**, encouraging people to recognise that our interactions should be accepting of, and responsive to, each other's backgrounds, circumstances, needs and preferences
- Opportunities for people to participate** equitably in Australian society and to understand the rights and responsibilities that we share as part of that society
- A sense of belonging for everyone** by helping communities work towards a spirit of inclusiveness and a shared identity as Australians, and
- The **benefits** of living in a multicultural society.

Sources and Additional Reading

Australian Human Rights Commission: *Face the Facts: Some Questions and Answers about Indigenous Peoples, Migrants and Refugees and Asylum Seekers* (2008) can be accessed at:

http://www.hreoc.gov.au/racial_discrimination/face_facts/index.html

Department of Immigration and Citizenship *Facts in Immigration*, Fact Sheet 2. At: <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/02key.htm>