Australian Multiculturalism Survey Findings Report

2023 marked 50 years since the introduction of multicultural policy in Australia. In recognition of this, the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) sought to undertake a comprehensive reflection on the current state of multiculturalism from the perspective of people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. Focusing on aspects related to social cohesion, sense of belonging, community participation, and encounters with racism and discrimination, FECCA captured valuable insights that will inform the ongoing development of Australian multicultural policy. In particular, the research addresses both indicators of success and areas of concern for future policy initiatives aiming to foster a more cohesive and inclusive multicultural Australia.

Project Overview

The Australian Multiculturalism Project deployed a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, including a survey, stakeholder consultations, and expert interviews. This report details quantitative findings from the online survey, which was completed by 501 individuals from CALD backgrounds residing in Australia between June 2022 and July 2023. The survey was promoted to all FECCA stakeholders, friends, members, and broader networks, and was translated into 14 languages: Amharic, Arabic, Assyrian, Burmese, Chinese (Traditional and Simplified), Dari, Dinka, Farsi, Karen, Kirundi, Nepali, Swahili, and Urdu. 6% of respondents completed the survey in their preferred language (not English). As the survey sample is not representative of the broader population in terms of size or demographics, findings are not generalisable at scale, but they nonetheless offer insight into multicultural experiences in contemporary Australia.

A note on usage of percentages:
There were varied numbers of responses to survey questions, as some respondents opted not to answer some questions. Where percentages are used throughout this report, they have been calculated based on the number of total responses to that question.

Key Findings

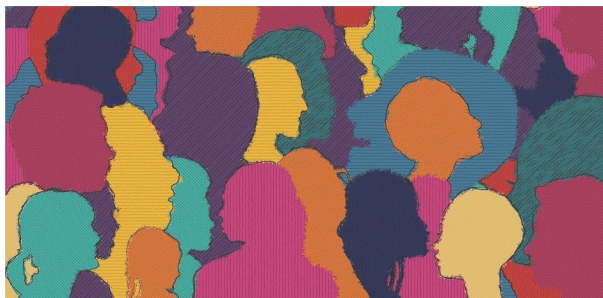84% of respondents consider Australia to be their home, and 66% feel a sense of belonging in Australia

70% have experienced racism or discrimination, though 75% have never reported a racist experience

92% feel they contribute to Australian society

63% agree that Australia is a successful multicultural country

FECCA
Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia

MONASH University

MONASH MIGRATION AND INCLUSION CENTRE

Respondent demographics

- Age
    - 5% of respondents are aged between 18 and 24
    - 71% are aged between 25 and 54
    - 14% are aged between 55 and 64
    - 8% are aged between 65 and 74
    - 2% are aged over 74
- Gender
    - 71% of respondents identify as female
    - 27% identify as male
    - 1% identify as non-binary
- 79% of respondents were not born in Australia
- Countries where biggest numbers of respondents were born: India (10%), China (6%), Philippines (5%), Iran (3%), Sri Lanka (3%), Malaysia (3%)
- Respondents have lived in Australia for varied lengths of time, with largest segment having lived here for more than 20 years (38%)
- Majority of respondents are Australian citizens (65%) or permanent residents (77%) – there is some dual identification with these two categories. 15% of respondents do not have permanent resident or Australian citizen status.
- 94% of respondents speak English as their primary language. The next biggest primary language group is Chinese (3%).
- 93% of respondents self-report speaking English 'Well' or 'Very well'. 5% speak English 'Not well', and just 2 reported they do not speak English at all.
- 76% of respondents live in metropolitan areas, with 23% living in regional or rural locations
- 81% of respondents are currently employed
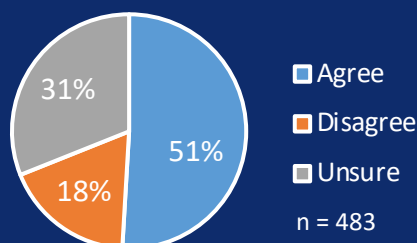
Survey Findings

Belonging

Feeling at home in Australia

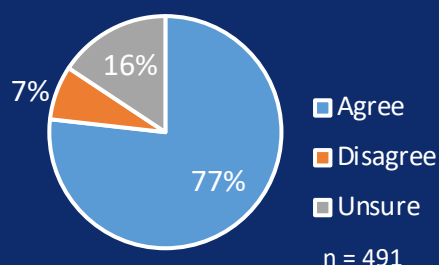Response to: Do you consider Australia to be your home?

11%
5%
84%

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

n = 494
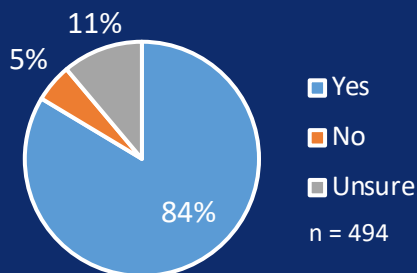
Feeling included in neighbourhood

Response to: I feel included in my neighbourhood

31%
18%
51%

- Agree
- Disagree
- Unsure

n = 483

Feeling welcome in Australia

Response to: I feel welcome in Australia

7%
16%
77%

- Agree
- Disagree
- Unsure

n = 491

Feeling of belonging

Response to: Australia is a place where I feel that I belong

- Agree: 66%
- Disagree: 9%
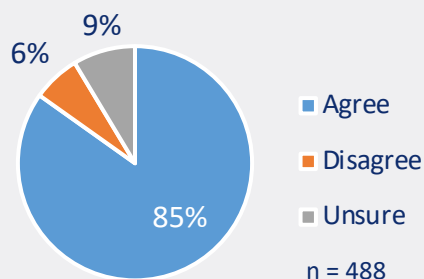- Unsure: 25%

n = 487
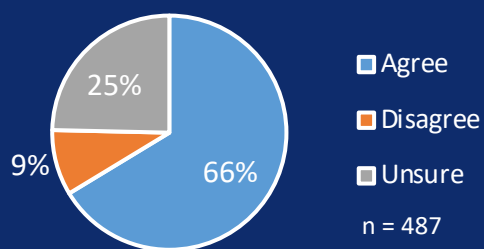
Racism and discrimination

Experience of racism

Response to: I have experienced some racism in Australia because of my skin colour, ethnic origin or religious belief

- Agree: 70%
- Disagree: 18%
- Unsure: 12%

n = 489
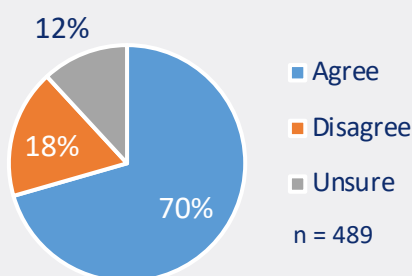
Response to: I have friends and/or family who have experienced racism in Australia

- Agree: 85%
- Disagree: 6%
- Unsure: 9%

n = 488

Main environments where respondents report experiencing racism (n = 432):
- Work (46%)
- School or university (16%)
- On the street or in their neighbourhood (20%)
- Accessing a government service (10%)
- 'Other' places (22%)

Reporting racism and discrimination

75% of respondents who have experienced racism said they **did not report it** (n = 465).

Those who did report most commonly did so to:
- Leadership at their workplace (9%)
- Their school or university (3%)
- Australian Human Rights Commission (3%)
- State anti-discrimination bodies (2%)
- Police (2%)

Reasons for not reporting experiences of racism (n = 369):
- 'I don't believe it will help to report' (44%)
- 'It was just a small incident, I was not too worried' (34%)
- 'I do not know where to report racist experiences' (20%)
- 'I felt silly or shameful' (8%)

Participation and contribution

Employment barriers

Main barriers to getting a job or getting the job respondents want (n = 470):
- Discrimination, including racism (15%)
- Language (10%)
- Limited experience in Australia (7%)
- Overseas qualifications not being recognised (7%)
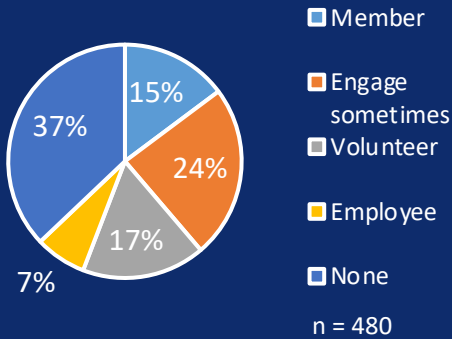- No barrier to employment (31%)

### Volunteering

Response to: Do you do any volunteer work?

- Yes: 64%
- No: 33%
- Unsure: 3%

n = 486
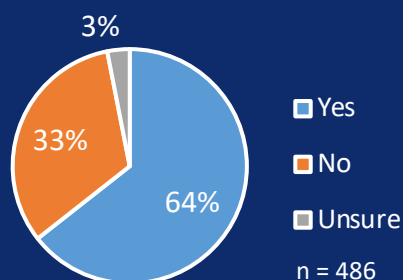
Engagement with local ethnic/cultural community organisations

Respondent participation

- Member
- Engage sometimes
- Volunteer
- Employee
- None

15%
24%
17%
7%
37%

n = 480

Engagement with institutions such as libraries, museums or galleries

Respondent participation

- Member
- Engage sometimes
- Volunteer
- Employee
- None

29%
35%
1%
3%
32%

n = 478
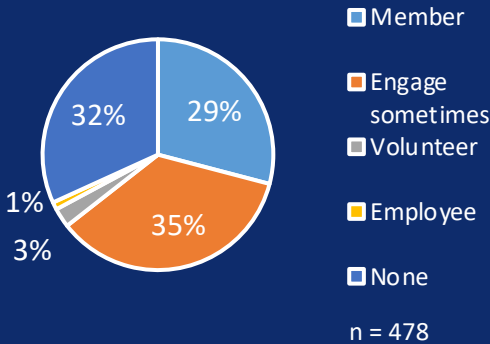
Representation of respondent cultures on Australian TV and media

Response to: There is enough representation of my cultural/ethnic background in Australian television and media
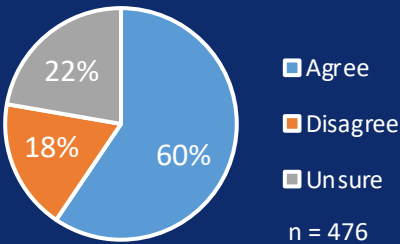
- Agree
- Disagree
- Unsure

25%
56%
19%

n = 486
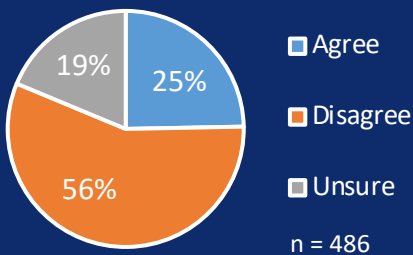
Cultural expression and safety

Response to: I feel safe expressing my culture in Australia

- Agree
- Disagree
- Unsure

15%
17%
68%

n = 485
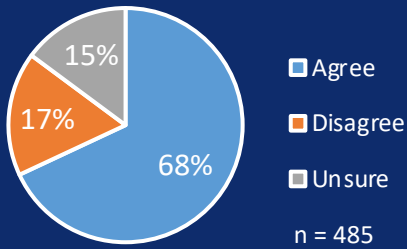
Freedom of religious expression

Response to: I feel free to express my religious beliefs in Australia
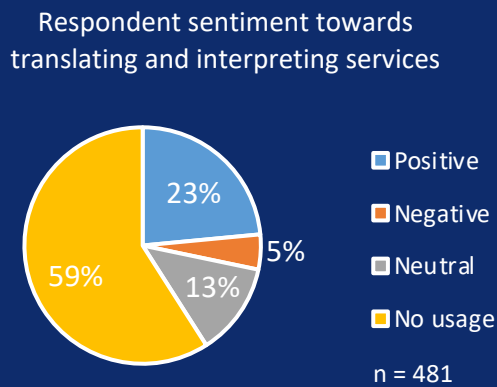
- Agree
- Disagree
- Unsure

22%
18%
60%

n = 476

Feeling of contribution to Australian society
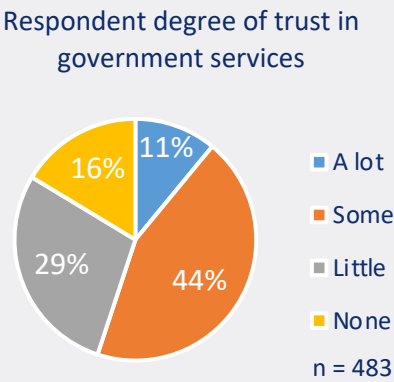
Response to: I contribute towards the Australian society

- Agree
- Disagree
- Unsure

2% 6%
92%

n = 484
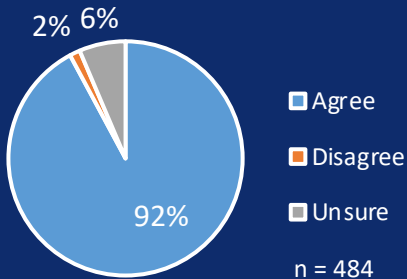
Perspectives on translating and interpreting services

Respondent awareness

- ☐ I know about this service
- ☐ I do NOT know about this service
- ☐ Unsure

86%
10%
4%

n = 481

Respondent sentiment towards translating and interpreting services

- ☐ Positive
- ☐ Negative
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ No usage

23%
5%
13%
59%

n = 481

Multiculturalism and the nation

Sense of representation by politicians

Response to: Do you feel represented by Australian federal politicians?

- ■ Yes
- ■ No
- ■ Unsure

16%
55%
29%

n = 486
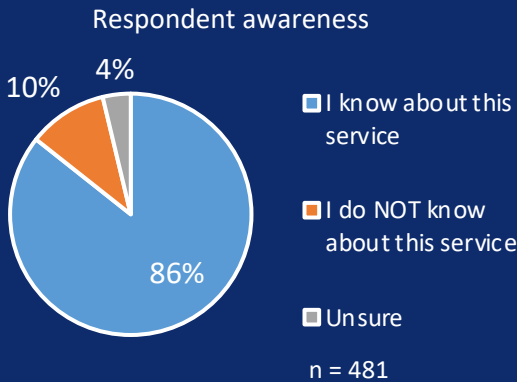
Response to: Do you feel represented by your state politicians?

- ■ Yes
- ■ No
- ■ Unsure

18%
54%
28%

n = 485

Trust in government services

Respondent degree of trust in government services

- ■ A lot
- ■ Some
- ■ Little
- ■ None

11%
44%
29%
16%

n = 483
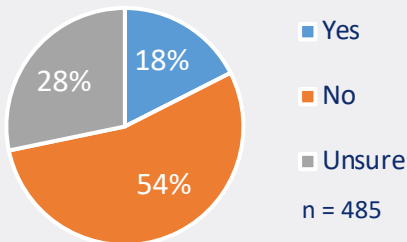
Australia as a successful multicultural country

Response to: Australia is a successful multicultural country

- ■ Agree
- ■ Disagree
- ■ Unsure

63%
20%
17%

n = 488

Discussion and Conclusion
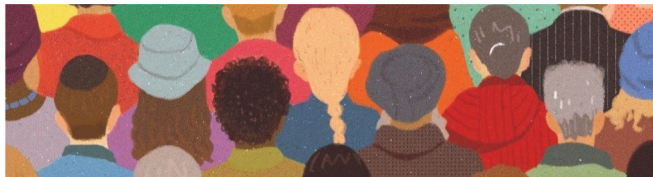
The survey responses paint an overall positive picture of multicultural Australians' perspectives on life and multiculturalism in Australia. There is a strong sense of feeling welcome and at home in Australia, and a majority agreed it is a place they feel they belong, and that Australia is a successful multicultural country. These are important markers of success for Australian multiculturalism.

The priority areas calling for improvement relate to experiences of racism, and avenues for reporting and redress. Of those respondents who indicated they have experienced racism (70%), 75% said they did not report it. 44% said this was because they thought it would not help, and 20% said they did not know where to report it. Relatedly, discrimination was also the most commonly reported barrier to employment, and workplaces were the most common environment where experiences of racism occurred. These are insights that can direct future efforts for state and federal governments, and community and human rights organisations and authorities – including the development of the National Anti-Racism Framework, which is currently underway.

In terms of community participation and contribution, the survey showed that the majority of respondents (64%) do volunteer work, and 92% feel they contribute to Australian society. This is consistent with the commonly observed notion that people from migrant backgrounds feel a strong sense of wanting to give back to the communities that have welcomed them. Contrasting with this level of contribution, more than half the respondents (56%) indicated there is not enough representation of their cultures or ethnicities in Australian television and media. The survey also showed a mixed level of engagement with local ethnic/cultural community organisations, highlighting that while many multicultural Australians are engaging with them, a substantial number (37%) remain outside of these formal networks.

Regarding attitudes towards federal and state politicians, it is notable that more than half the respondents do not feel adequately represented.

While this sentiment may echo feelings in the broader population, it nonetheless points to a representation gap for multicultural Australians. Likewise, trust in government services remains fraught, with just 11% of respondents indicating they 'Have a lot of trust' in government services, and 16% indicating they 'Have no trust at all'.

Final reflections

It is important to contextualise the survey's findings as representing the views and experiences of people with a predominantly self-reported high level of English language proficiency, which in turn reduces other barriers and challenges that may lead to alternative or more negative outcomes. Additionally, 71% of survey respondents identify as female, meaning the results also skew towards representing women's experiences more than men's or those who are gender diverse.

It is also interesting to observe that the questions which were more subjective and conceptual in nature garnered higher responses of 'Unsure'. For example, one quarter of respondents were unsure about the statement 'Australia is a place where I feel I belong', and 31% were unsure about the statement 'I feel included in my neighbourhood'. This is not surprising in the sense that many questions asked respondents to signal a position on topics they may not actively consider in their day-to-day lives (though these issues may be everyday concerns for others). Nonetheless, it emphasises the complexity of experiences underlying multicultural Australia, and the challenges of trying to capture these intricacies through an online survey (which bears its own limitations, such as digital ability and access). This finding therefore highlights the value of employing complementary qualitative methods, such as interviews, which can delve more deeply to capture the nuances surrounding these complex questions. The above examples also show that while the survey signals some positive outcomes for multicultural Australians 50 years on from the introduction of multicultural policy, there remains room for improvement in these crucial domains of community inclusion and belonging.