



Community Information Summary

Sri Lanka-born

Historical Background

In the late nineteenth century, the first Sri Lankan immigrants to Australia were recruited to work on the cane plantations of northern Queensland. There are also reports of Sri Lankans working in goldfields in New South Wales and Victoria, and as pearlers in Broome, north-western Australia. By 1901, there were 609 Sri Lanka-born people recorded in Australia.

Following Sri Lanka's independence in 1948 and the introduction of the Sinhala Only Act (*Official Language Act No.33 of 1956*), which mandated Sinhalese as the only official language replacing English, many Tamils and Burghers (of mixed European descent) felt disenfranchised. This resulted in significant numbers migrating to other countries including Australia. During the 1960s, Burghers comprised the largest proportion of Sri Lankan migrants to Australia.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s following the easing of Australia's migration policies, Asian migrants, including Sri Lankan, were admitted to Australia. Sri Lankan migrants at this time included Tamils, Sinhalese, as well as Burghers.

In the following decade, the number of Sri Lankans entering Australia increased. Many were fleeing the conflict in Sri Lanka between Tamil separatists and Sri Lankan government forces, which ended in May 2009. Most of them arrived as Humanitarian entrants under the Special Assistance Category introduced by the Australian Government in 1995. By 2001, there were 53 610 Sri Lanka-born people in Australia.

In the last five years, the majority, or more than 70 per cent, of migrants from Sri Lanka arrived under the Skilled component of the Migration Program, with around 17 per cent under the Family component.

Today

Geographic Distribution

The latest Census in 2011 recorded 86 413 Sri Lanka-born people in Australia, an increase of 38.8 per cent from the 2006 Census. The 2011 distribution by state and territory showed Victoria had the largest number with 43 991 followed by New South Wales (23704), Queensland (7696) and Western Australia (5339).

Refer to Figure 1.

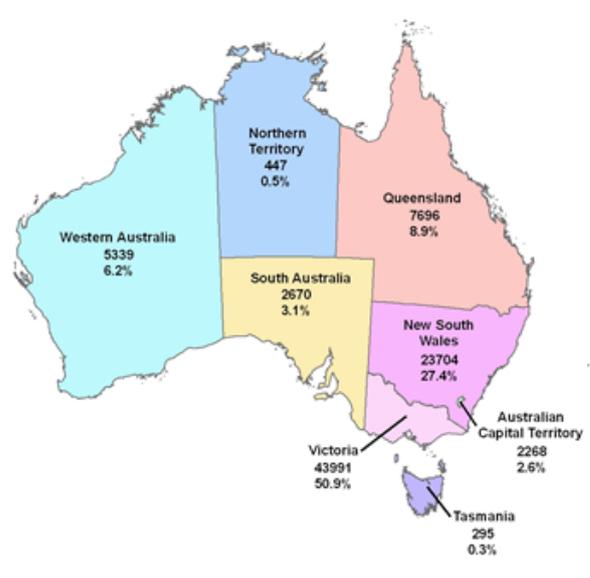


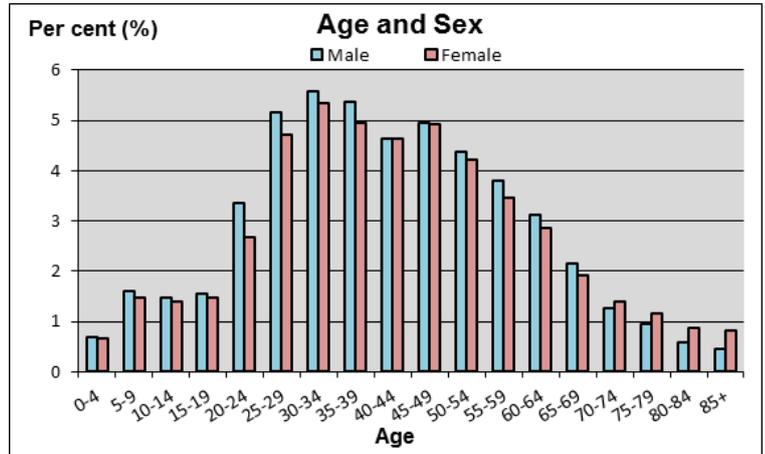
Figure 1

Age and Sex

The median age of the Sri Lanka-born in 2011 was 41 years compared with 45 years for all overseas-born and 37 years for the total Australian population.

The age distribution showed 7.3 per cent were aged 0-14 years, 9.1 per cent were 15-24 years, 40.4 per cent were 25-44 years, 31.7 per cent were 45-64 years and 11.6 per cent were 65 years and over.

Of the Sri Lanka-born in Australia, there were 44 121 males (51.1 per cent) and 42 294 females (48.9 per cent). The sex ratio was 104.3 males per 100 females.

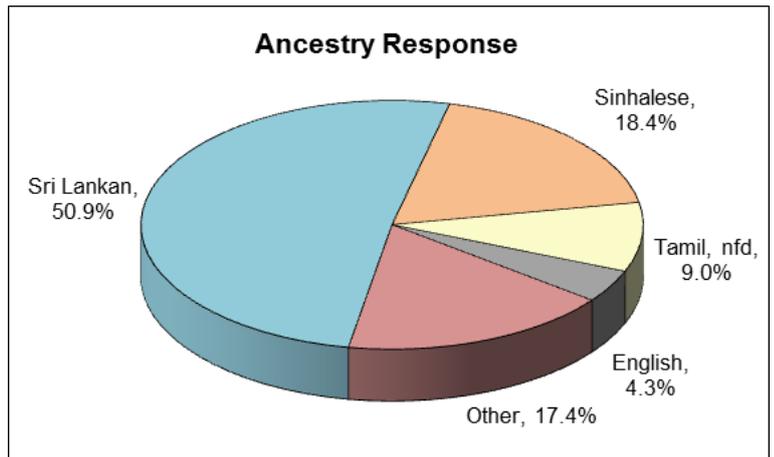


Ancestry

In the 2011 Census, the top ancestry responses* that Sri Lanka-born people reported were Sri Lankan (47 685), Sinhalese (17 272) and Tamil, nfd (8427).

In the 2011 Census, Australians reported around 300 different ancestries. Of the total ancestry responses*, 75 136 responses were towards Sri Lankan ancestry, 22 945 towards Sinhalese ancestry and 5182 towards Sri Lankan Tamil ancestry.

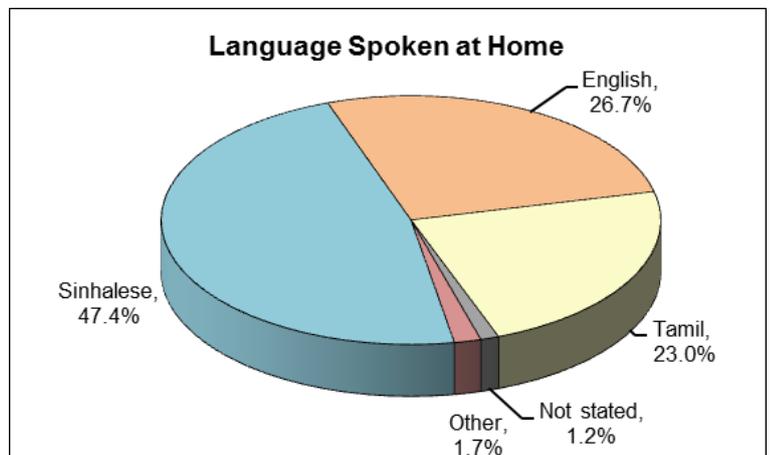
*At the 2011 Census up to two responses per person were allowed for the Ancestry question; therefore providing the total responses and not persons count



Language

The main languages spoken at home by Sri Lanka-born people in Australia were Sinhalese (40 926), English (23 112) and Tamil (19 854).

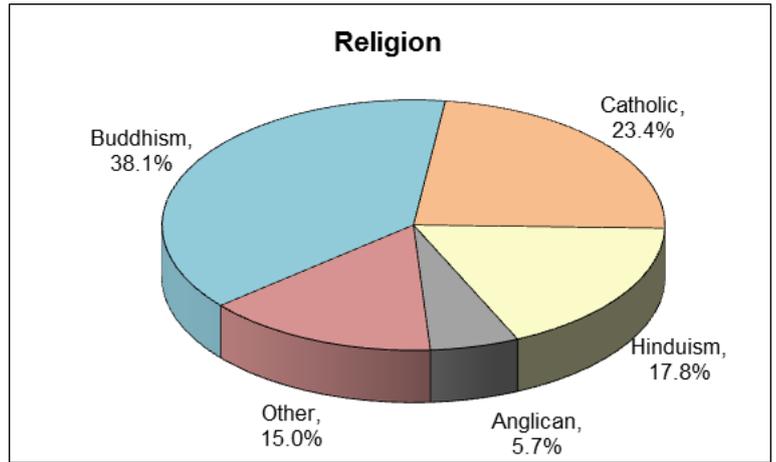
Of the 63 301 Sri Lanka-born who spoke a language other than English at home, 91.9 per cent spoke English very well or well, and 6.1 per cent spoke English not well or not at all.



Religion

At the 2011 Census the major religious affiliations amongst Sri Lanka-born were Buddhism (32 952), Catholic (20 215) and Hinduism (15 382).

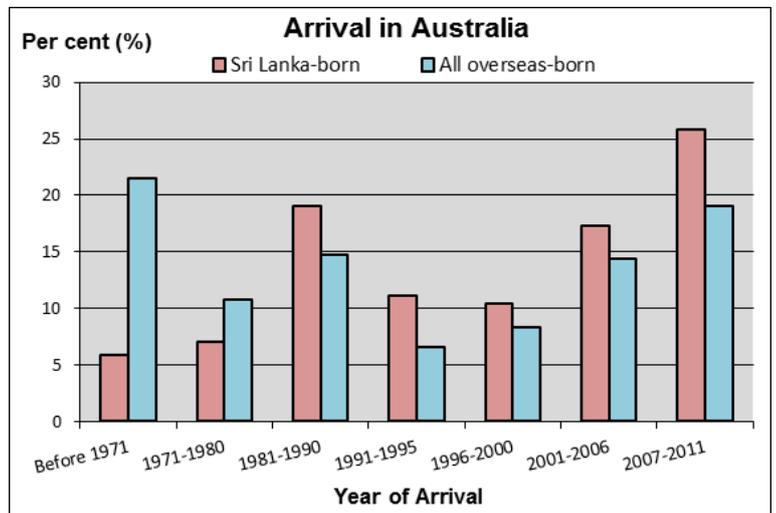
Of the Sri Lanka-born, 2.7 per cent stated 'No Religion' which was lower than that of the total Australian population (22.3 per cent), and 1.6 per cent did not state a religion.



Arrival

Compared to 62 per cent of the total overseas-born population, 53.5 per cent of the Sri Lanka-born people in Australia arrived in Australia prior to 2001.

Among the total Sri Lanka-born in Australia at the 2011 Census, 17.3 per cent arrived between 2001 and 2006 and 25.8 per cent arrived between 2007 and 2011.



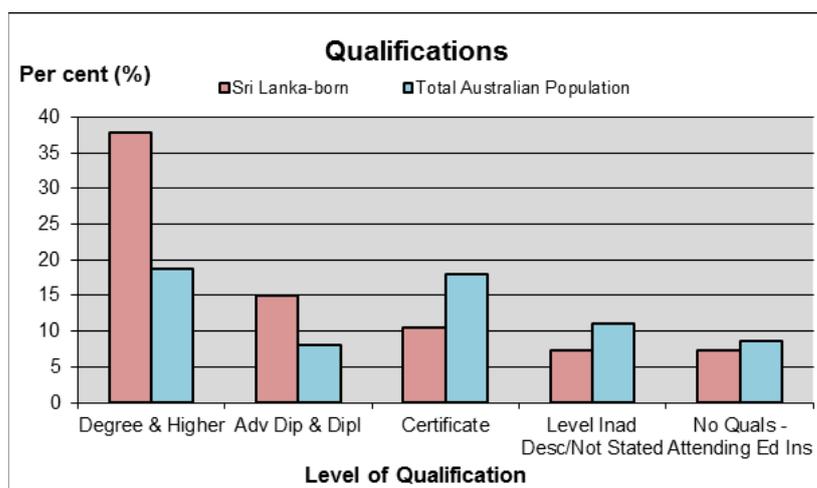
Median Income

At the time of the 2011 Census, the median individual weekly income for the Sri Lanka-born in Australia aged 15 years and over was \$686, compared with \$538 for all overseas-born and \$597 for all Australia-born. The total Australian population had a median individual weekly income of \$577.

Qualifications

At the 2011 Census, 70.6 per cent of the Sri Lanka-born aged 15 years and over had some form of higher non-school qualifications compared to 55.9 per cent of the Australian population.

Of the Sri Lanka-born aged 15 years and over, 7.3 per cent were still attending an educational institution. The corresponding rate for the total Australian population was 8.6 per cent.

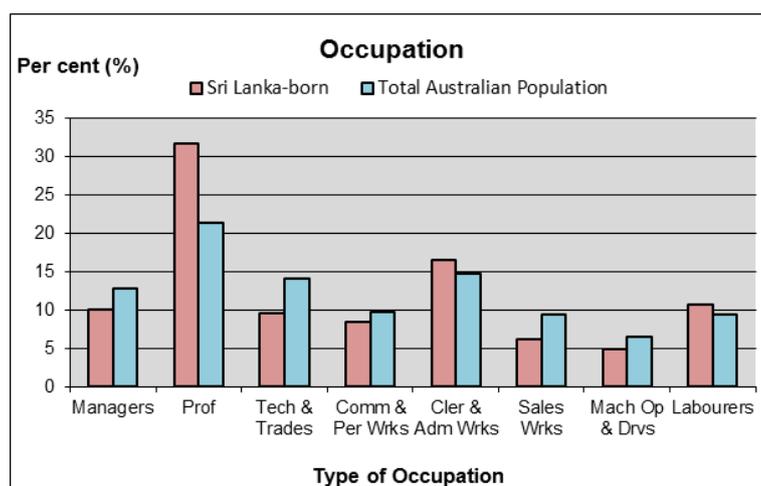


Level Inad Desc/Not Stated = Education level inadequately described or not stated
No Quals - Attending Ed Ins = No qualifications and still attending educational institution

Employment

Among Sri Lanka-born people aged 15 years and over, the participation rate in the labour force was 72.2 per cent and the unemployment rate was 6.9 per cent. The corresponding rates in the total Australian population were 65 per cent and 5.6 per cent respectively.

Of the 53 217 Sri Lanka-born who were employed, 51.3 per cent were employed in either a skilled managerial, professional or trade occupation. The corresponding rate in the total Australian population was 48.4 per cent.



Comm & Per Wrks = Community & Personal Service Workers

Produced by Community Relations Section of DIAC

All data used in this summary is sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics Census of Population and Housing. Sources for the Historical Background available at <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/statistics/comm-summ/source.htm>