

Combating Racism and Prejudice in Schools: Keynotes

Keynote 7

Arabs and Muslims in Australia

The following information is also relevant to Keynote 7:

The Introduction: Background information outlining the context and purpose of the project.

Keynote 1 – Violence and Conflict: Issues and Strategies for Schools: A theoretical background to understanding conflict and violence and how schools can address issues of intolerance.

Keynote 2 – A Whole-School Approach to Combating Racism and Prejudice: An audit strategy for schools to plan and monitor their approaches to combating racism. This is adapted from [Racism No Way](http://www.racismnoway.com.au/strategies/framework/body-Schools.html) (www.racismnoway.com.au/strategies/framework/body-Schools.html); a web site aimed at teachers seeking to challenge and counter racism.

The following Keynotes cover the nine most significantly represented religions in Australia and include suggestions for classroom activities:

Keynote 3 – The Abrahamic Religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam

Keynote 4 – The Abrahamic Religions: Judaism

Keynote 5 - The Abrahamic Religions: Middle Eastern Christians

Keynote 6 – The Abrahamic Religions: Islam

Keynote 7 – Arabs and Muslims in Australia (this document)

Keynote 8 – Indian Religions: Hinduism

Keynote 9 – Indian Religions: Sikhism

Keynote 10 – Indian Religions: Buddhism

Keynote 11 – Bahá'í Faith

You can also download a full version of *Combating Racism and Prejudice in Schools*, which includes all of the Keynotes listed above. This full document, as well as all of the above sections can be downloaded from the [Keynotes Explained](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/multicultural/tchkeynotes.htm) (<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/multicultural/tchkeynotes.htm>) web page on the [Multicultural Education](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/multicultural/default.htm) (<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/multicultural/default.htm>) site.

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Introduction

When talking about Arabs and Muslims, we are faced with a variety of definitions and terms describing regions and identities. The complexities of changes in names and boundaries of countries are of particular interest. Cultural and religious identities and different ways of describing regions require sensitive and well-informed teachers. The regions, religions and cultures that are the focus of this set of Keynotes are those with links with the Middle East and Central Asia, and include Muslims from South and East Asia, Africa and Europe.

A popular misconception is that all Arabs are Muslim and all Muslims are Arabs. In fact, of the 1300 million Muslims in the world, more than 80 percent are non-Arab (Saeed, p.10). It is similar to saying all Christians are Catholic and come from Rome. Such inaccuracies do little for the dignity of the communities concerned and possibly hinder community relations. It is worth noting here a common misconception around the word *Allah*. Many people think of *Allah* as an Islamic term but, as the Arabic word for God, it is used by Arabic speakers of all denominations to refer to their god.

Arabic and Muslim community members wish to point out that in Australia their communities have a high level of citizenship and live in harmony with each other and with the wider community. The conflicts in different parts of the world so vividly presented to us in the media often leave students with a simplistic impression of the causes of conflict. Inaccurate or incomplete information contributes to negative stereotyping of people.

Who are Arab Australians?

Dr William Jonas AM, in his report, *Isma – Listen. National Consultations on eliminating prejudice against Arab and Muslim Australians* summed up the difficulties with ascribing identity.

Determining exact numbers and cultural identity of Arabic background Australians can be complex as nationality is not always synonymous with cultural identity or ethnicity. For example, some Iraqis identify their ethnicity as Kurdish not Arab. Similarly, some Lebanese-born Christians identify as Phoenician (Jonas). Limiting a definition of 'Arab Australian' to people born in Arab countries would have excluded Arabic-speaking Australians from places like Ethiopia and Eritrea which are not usually defined as 'Arab' countries.

The term 'Arab Australian' refers broadly to people bound by a common language (Arabic) and a common cultural heritage which can be traced back to the Arabic-speaking countries of the Middle East and North Africa. 'Arab Australians' includes all those who identify with this group and live in Australia, either as a permanent resident or with temporary resident status.

Population data: Arabs in Australia

Arab Australians are a diverse group. The most common country of origin of Arab Australians is Lebanon followed by Egypt, Iraq and Syria. More recently arrived communities tend to be smaller in number and come from a wider range of Middle Eastern and North African countries such as Iraq, Sudan and Somalia.

The 2001 Census noted that there were 209,372 people who spoke Arabic across Australia (ABS 2001), which makes Arabic the fourth largest language other than English, spoken at home in Australia.

Most Arab Australians live in New South Wales and Victoria with smaller populations in Western Australia, Queensland and South Australia. A relatively small proportion lives in the Northern Territory, Tasmania or the ACT. Arab Australians live mainly in urban areas and are concentrated in specific parts of cities such as Sydney's south-west and Melbourne's north-western suburbs (Jonas – from ABS data).

Arab immigration accounts for eight percent of the total migration to Australia. According to the 2001 Census, 162,283 Australians (0.8% of Australia's population) were born in the 22 Arab League nations. Another 120,000 Australian-born people have at least one parent born in an Arab country.

Religious affiliation of Arab Australians

For various reasons, migrants from Middle Eastern countries have been largely Christian. Chain migration from Lebanon, particularly up to 1975, tended to attract the Christian relatives of earlier Lebanese settlers. Migration from Egypt included many persons of Greek and Maltese backgrounds. Members of some Middle Eastern Christian groups, such as Copts from Egypt and Assyrians from Iraq came to Australia to escape persecution or discrimination. Many members of Australia's small Palestinian community are Christians.

From the last census it appears that the majority of Arab Australians are Christian. For example, 55 percent of Lebanese-born Australians are Christian (the main groups are Maronite and Melkite Catholics), while 41 percent are Muslim (predominantly Sunni) with smaller numbers of Shi'ites, Druze and Alawi. (Jonas from ABS data 2001).

Religious affiliation of Arabic background Victorians

In Victoria, according to the 2001 census, there were similar numbers of Christians and Muslims among people of Arabic background. Christians were more likely to be concentrated in the metropolitan areas whereas in non-metropolitan areas, the percentage of Muslims to Christians among Arab Australians was significantly higher. No other religious affiliation was significant.

Table 7.1 Arabic Language by Religion Victoria.

Religion	Melbourne		Other		Victoria Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Catholic	10,085	22	175	12	10,260	22
Greek Orthodox	3,272	7	63	4	3,335	7
Macedonian Orthodox	-	0	-	0	-	0
Other Christian	7,711	17	134	9	7,845	17
Total Christian	21,068	46	372	25	21,440	45
Buddhism	58	0	21	1	79	0
Hinduism	3	0	3	0	6	0
Islam	21,918	48	955	65	22,873	48
Judaism	23	0	3	0	26	0
Other Religions	733	2	20	1	753	2
No Religion	345	1	33	2	378	1
Religious belief nfd or inadequately defined	294	1	38	3	332	1
Not Stated	1,294	3	24	2	1,318	3
Total	45,736	100	1,469	100	47,205	100

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001 Census of Population and Housing.

Population data: Muslims in Australia

The most recent Australian census in 2001 recorded a remarkable rate of growth in Australia's Muslim population. The census listed 281,576 Australian Muslims, an increase of some 40 percent in five years, compared to an increase in the total Australian population of only 5.7 percent for the same period. Of this growth, 40 percent came from natural birth and 60 percent from migration.

The Australian Muslim population almost doubled between 1991 and 2001.

Australian Muslims are a very young population: almost 50 percent are aged 24 and under (compared to 35 percent of non-Muslim Australians).

The largest birthplace group of Australian Muslims (approx 103,000) is the second generation Australian-born. Most of Australia's Muslims were born in countries outside the Middle East.

Although the largest single overseas-born Muslim group in Australia is from Lebanon, Arab Muslims as a whole are outnumbered by Muslims from a wide variety of countries, such as Asia, Europe, Africa and Oceania.

In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of Muslim migrants and refugees who have arrived from Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Pakistan, Indonesia, Horn of Africa, Bangladesh and Malaysia. Australia's Muslim community is in fact drawn from more than 70 different countries.

In Victoria, the largest group of overseas born Muslims is from Turkey. There is also a significant group from Cyprus and emerging birthplaces include the Horn of Africa, particularly Somalia and Ethiopia.

Australian Muslims live mostly in the cities. Sydney has 48 percent of the population and Melbourne 31 percent.

Major birthplaces for Australian Muslim

Table 7.2 Major birthplaces for Australian Muslims

Birthplace	Number	% of Religion
Australia	102,566	36.4
Lebanon	29,231	10.4
Turkey	23,923	8.3
Afghanistan	9923	3.5
Bosnia and Herzegovina	9892	3.5
Pakistan	9238	3.3
Indonesia	8087	2.9
Iraq	7749	2.8
Bangladesh	7596	2.7
Iran	6353	2.3
Other	67,372	23.9
Total	281,576	100

Source: Department of Immigration and Citizenship *The People of Australia*. Birthplace of Selected Religious Groups – Australia 2001 Census.

Major birthplaces for Victorian Muslims

Table 7.3 Major birthplaces for Victorian Muslims

Birthplace	Number	% of Religion
Australia	34,219	39.7
Turkey	12,374	14.0
Lebanon	6317	7.1
Bosnia and Herzegovina	3844	4.3
Afghanistan	3153	3.6
Cyprus	2344	2.7
Somalia	2253	2.5
Pakistan	2150	2.4
FYROM	2131	2.4
Iraq	1743	2.0
Indonesia	1706	1.9
Iran	1211	1.4
Other	14,995	17.0
Total	88,440	100

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001 Census of Population and Housing.

Languages spoken by Australian Muslims

The three main languages spoken at home by Australian Muslims are Arabic, Turkish and English.

Approximately 95,000 Muslims in Australia use Arabic, 45,000 use Turkish, and 32,000 use English as their language at home.

87 percent of Australian Muslims speak English in addition to another language.

Arabic speaking students in Victorian schools

Our school communities have significant numbers of both Arabic-speaking students and Muslim students. The following snapshot of Arabic-speaking background students in Victorian schools shows their distribution across the state and their country of birth. The information is taken from the August 2005 School Census. The School Census does not include data on religious background.

From the table below it can be seen that Arabic speakers are concentrated in the metropolitan area with almost half of the state's total attending Northern Metropolitan Region schools. Students from Sudan, a recent group of refugee arrivals, were the largest group with large concentrations in Southern and Western regions. Students from Lebanon were the next largest group. There is a significant population of Iraqi students in Hume.

Note: Data from the Sudan may be skewed slightly as some of the African languages, which may be first languages spoken by the Sudanese, are not recorded either by the ABS or CASES.

Arabic speakers in Victorian government schools

Table 7.4 Arabic speakers in Vic govt schools by region and country of birth – Aug 2005

Birth Country	Total	BSW	EMR	Gippsland	Grampians	Hume	Loddon Mallee	NMR	SMR	WMR
Afghanistan	4								4	
Algeria	9							7		2
Australia	5853	4	338	3	11	112	9	3306	621	1449
Austria	2							2		
Canada	5		2							3
China	1		1							
Djibouti	2							1		1
Egypt	124	2	26		1			24	42	29
Eritrea	37							13	4	20
Ethiopia	15		4					3	6	2
Gaza and West Bank	10		3					5	2	
Greece	5							2	1	2
India	3							2		1
Indonesia	2							2		
Iran	80		1			24	5	40	2	8
Iraq	569	2	20			152	16	305	44	30
Israel	5							2		3
Italy	4								4	
Jordan	57		14			3		17	2	21
Kenya	19		5					1	7	6
Kuwait	95		29			34	1	26	3	2

Birth Country	Total	BSW	EMR	Gippsland	Grampians	Hume	Loddon Mallee	NMR	SMR	WMR
Lebanon	274	4	10		1	2	2	104	54	97
Liberia	1								1	
Libya	12						1	3	1	7
Malaysia	1							1		
Maldives	2							2		
Malta	1							1		
Morocco	6		3					3		
New Zealand	27		4		3		1	7	1	11
Oman	4							4		
Pakistan	14		2					5	4	3
Qatar	2							1		1
Russian Federation	1								1	
Samoa	1								1	
Saudi Arabia	135	1	6			22	1	60	26	19
Somalia	2									2
South Africa	1		1							
Sudan	819	8	98					91	368	254
Syria	43	1	3			5		29	3	2
Thailand	1							1		
Turkey	5							5		
UAE	17		5					2	3	7
UK	2		1				1			
USA	8		2					5		1
Venezuela	1							1		
Yemen	10	2			2			6		
Yugoslavia (FRY)	1								1	
Total	8292	24	578	3	18	354	37	4089	1206	1983

Source: Language Background Other than English survey 2005.

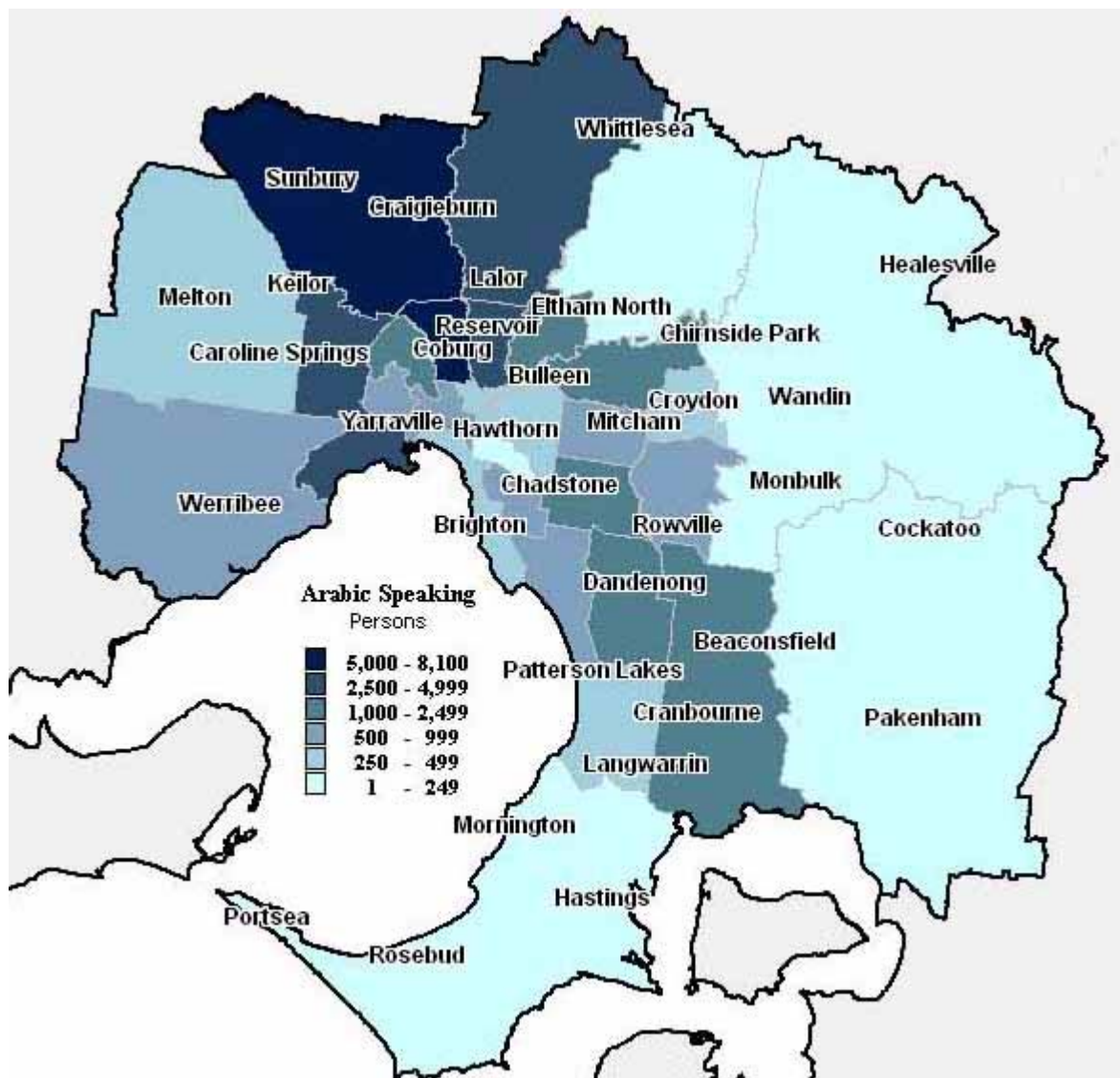
Distribution of Arabic speakers in Victoria

The two maps below show the distribution of Arabic speakers in Victoria based on the 2001 census. Predictably, they show a similar pattern to the school census data. The greatest concentration of Arabic speakers in the metropolitan area is in the north and north-west, particularly in Hume and Moreland LGAs.

In regional Victoria there are smaller, but significant populations in Greater Shepparton, Geelong, Moira (Cobram, Yarrawonga) and Mildura LGAs.

Figure 7.1 Distribution of Arabic Speakers: Melbourne 2001

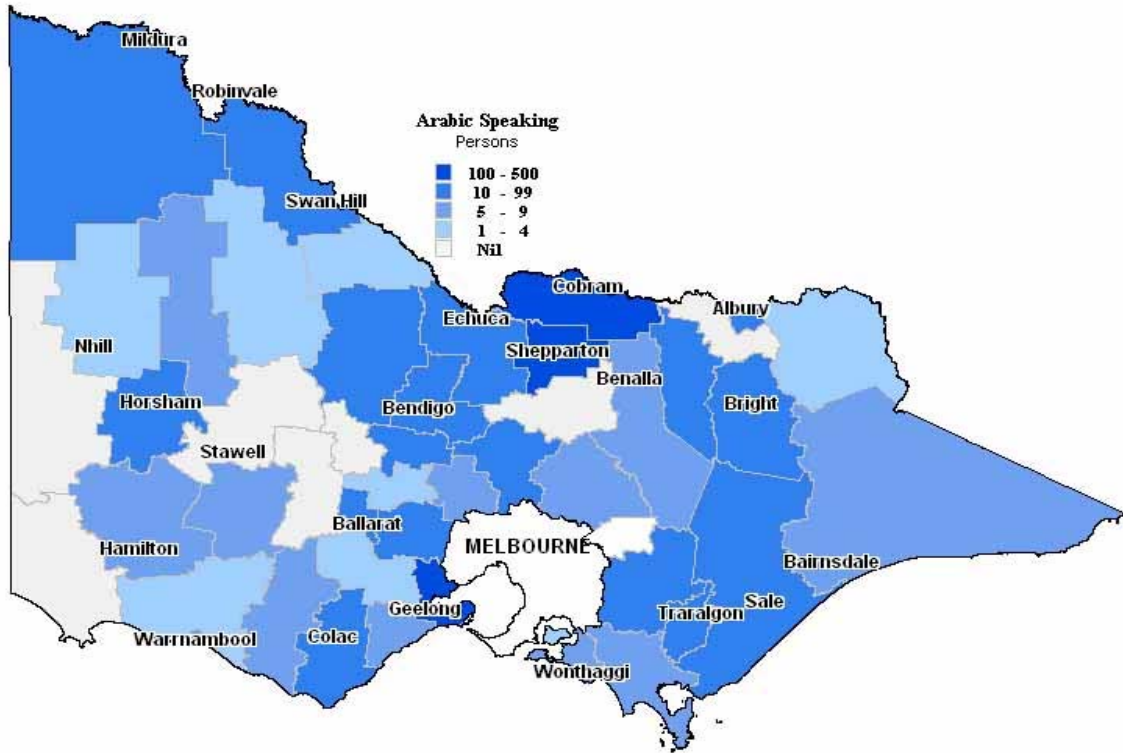
[Total Number = 45,787]



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001 Census of Population and Housing

Figure 7.2 Distribution of Arabic Speakers : non-metropolitan Victoria 2001

[TOTAL NUMBER =1,402]



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001 Census of Population and Housing.

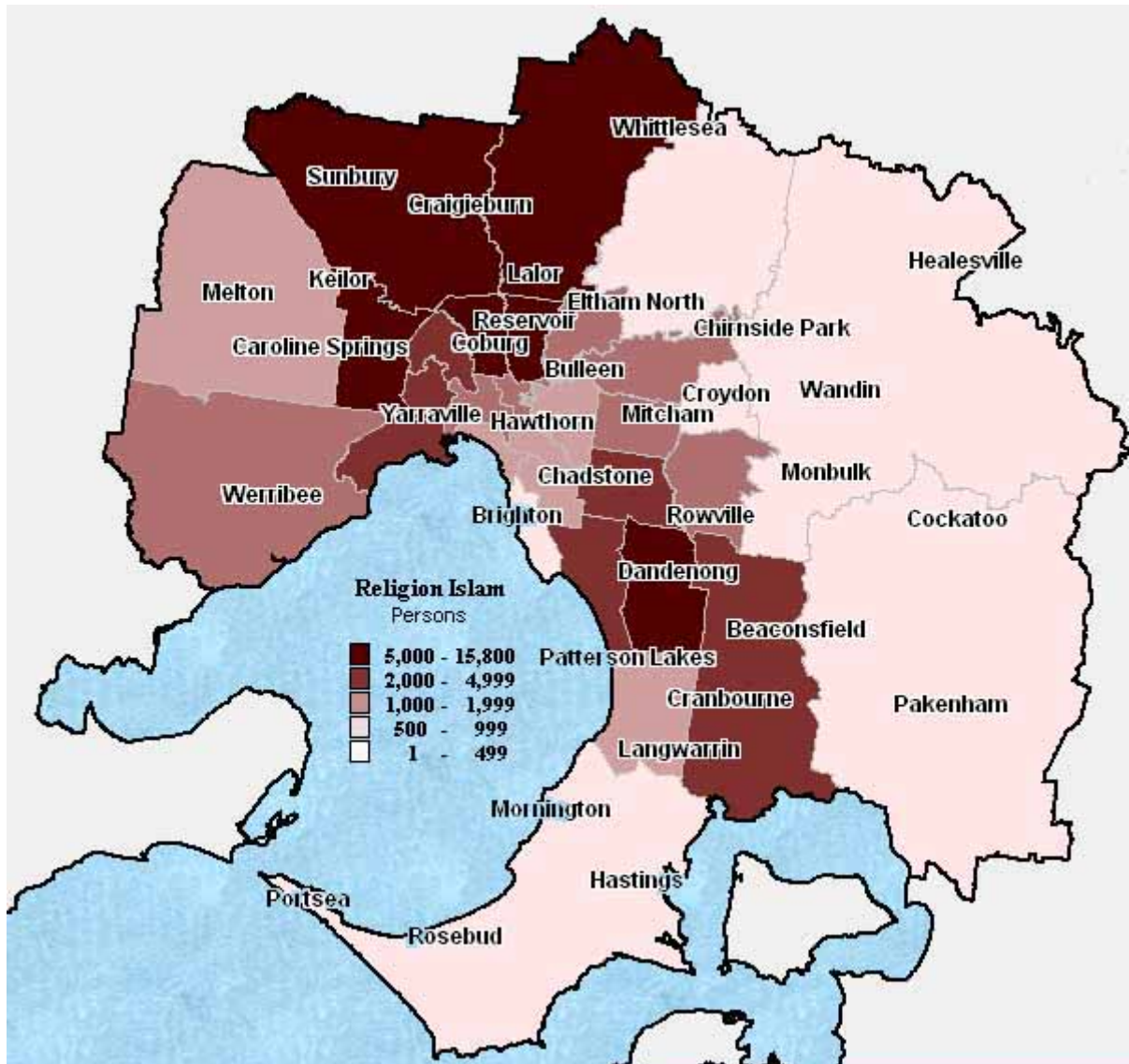
Distribution of Muslims in Victoria

The largest concentrations of Muslims in Victoria are in Melbourne’s north and north-west in the LGAs of Whittlesea, Hume, Brimbank, Darebin and Moreland. There is also a significant population in Greater Dandenong. Populations can be clustered in particular suburbs. For example, thirty-three percent of the population of Meadow Heights is Muslim.

Muslims, unlike other minority religions in Victoria, do have a tradition of settlement in non-metropolitan regions. Figure 7.4 shows a significant settlement pattern in larger regional towns and cities in the Mildura, Shepparton, La Trobe, Ballarat, Geelong and Albury-Wodonga LGAs.

Figure 7.3 Distribution of Muslims Metropolitan area 2001

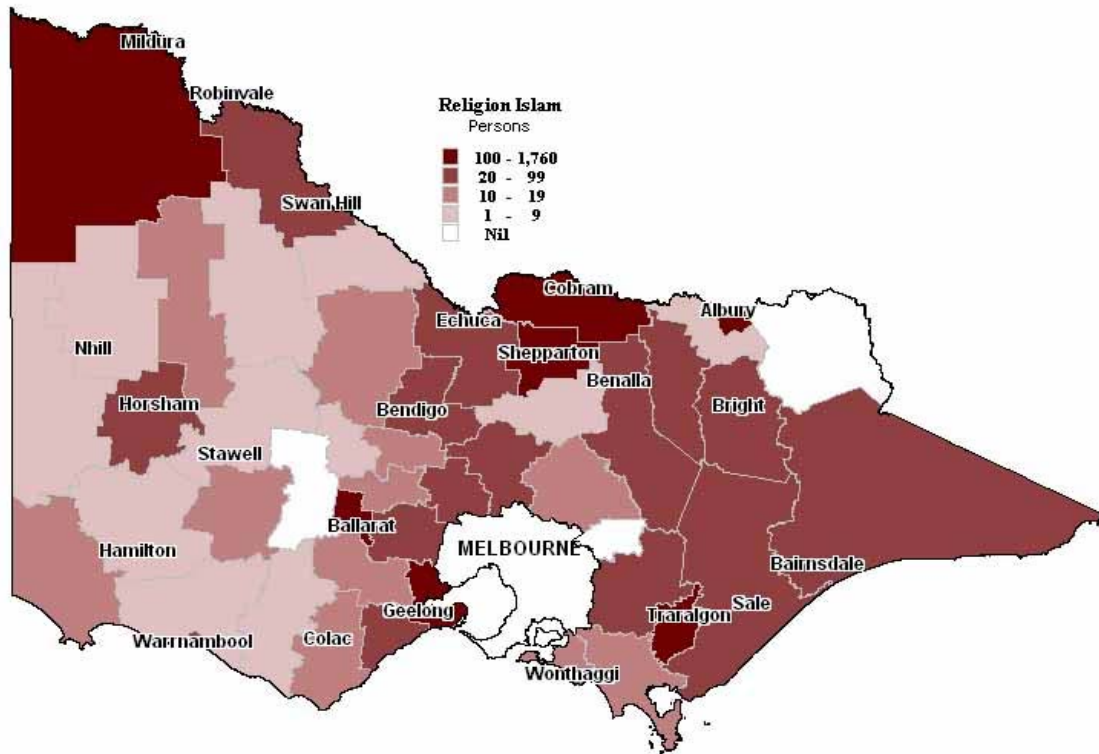
[TOTAL NUMBER = 87,755]



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001 Census of Population and Housing.

Figure 7.4 Distribution of Muslims: Victoria by Local Government Area

[TOTAL NUMBER = 4995]



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001 Census of Population and Housing

School census data: selected countries

The following data, drawn from a school census taken in August 2005 provides information on distribution of students from a range of Middle Eastern countries and countries that are known to have significant Muslim populations. The data is offered for interest only. No definitive conclusions can be drawn from the data about the numbers of Muslim students in our schools.

Table 7.5 Student Birthplace by Region

Birth Country	Total	Barwon South Western	Eastern Metropolitan	Gippsland	Grampians	Hume	Loddon Mallee	Northern Metropolitan	Southern Metropolitan	Western Metropolitan
Afghanistan	893	2	111		1	9	4	52	665	49
Albania	166	4	2			72	1	16	38	33
Bangladesh	147	2	34	4	1	2	6	21	45	32
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1050	59	56	2		4		108	498	323
Egypt	166	4	37		1		1	42	49	32
Ethiopia	341	6	14	4	1	1	4	47	93	171
Indonesia	516	13	196	4	2		10	107	101	83
Iran	397	12	179			24	5	98	48	31
Iraq	1049	2	30			155	15	755	52	40
Kuwait	122		43			34	1	29	12	3
Lebanon	263	5	17		1	2	2	115	43	78
Pakistan	428	2	61	2	10	9	1	95	171	77
Saudi Arabia	191	3	22	1		22	2	76	33	32
Somalia	579		25					308	16	230
Sudan	1762	26	223				1	171	661	680
Turkey	487	6	24			22	26	250	92	67
Total	8557	146	1074	17	17	356	79	2290	2617	1961

Arab and Muslim settlement in Australia

Note: the following material was provided by the Department of Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs during the Gulf War to contribute accurate information about the region and people of those backgrounds in Australia.

Migration to Australia from the Arab countries of the Middle East commenced in the nineteenth century, mainly from Christian communities in what is now Lebanon. The first significant groups of Muslim settlers in nineteenth century Australia were Afghan and Pakistani camel drivers who helped to open up the arid regions of outback Australia. Thus, Australia's first settlers from Arab countries were, in general, not Muslims, and our first Muslim settlers were, in the main, not Arabs.

For various reasons, migrants from Middle Eastern countries have been largely Christian. Chain migration from Lebanon, particularly up to 1975, tended to draw the Christian relatives of earlier Lebanese settlers. Migration from Egypt included many persons of Greek and Maltese backgrounds. Members of some Middle Eastern Christian groups, such as Copts from Egypt and Assyrians from Iraq came to Australia to escape persecution or discrimination. Many members of Australia's small Palestinian community are Christians.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade explains the growth and nature of the Australian Muslim population in these terms.

Between 1947 and 1971 the Muslim population increased from 2,704 to 22,311, as European Muslims, mainly Cypriot Turks sought a new life in Australia. Lebanese migrants, many of whom were Muslims, began arriving in larger numbers after the outbreak of civil war in Lebanon in 1975 (Islam in Australia)

Among thousands of Asian students studying in Australia, a significant number are from Muslim backgrounds particularly from countries such as Indonesia, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Many new immigrants are from North Africa, the former Yugoslav state of Bosnia and Eastern European countries such as Bulgaria are Muslims.

There have been many high-profile and successful members of the broad Arabic community in Australia. These include Professor Marie Bashir (Governor of New South Wales), Steve Bracks (Premier of Victoria), David Malouf (author) and Hazem El Masri (rugby league player).

Common misconceptions

Identity

Do not assume that the identity you ascribe to someone is the identity they choose for themselves.

Not everyone who comes from the Middle East or who is an Arabic speaker sees themselves as Arab.

A believer in Islam is a Muslim, not a Mohammedan (as has been incorrectly described in many texts in the past).

A Muslim is not always an Arab and might not even speak Arabic.

A speaker of Arabic is not necessarily an Arab.

A Muslim also has a cultural identity in addition to religious identity.

Names and pronunciation vary with different cultures. Transliterated spelling of the same name may vary between those of, for example, Turkish and Arabic background.

Considerations for schools

Check your curriculum and identify gaps and opportunities to introduce community relations and cultural and religious awareness of the whole Australian community. This is as important, possibly even more important, for schools with few students of different cultural and religious backgrounds as it is for schools with significantly diverse populations.

Check your school population and make sure all members of staff know the correct identity of students and their families.

Ensure that the school and students are aware of significant observances of students and their families. The month of Ramadan is an important Muslim observance for example (see Keynote 6 for more information).

Muslim celebrations, like festivals of other religions, should be acknowledged and respected.

In the classroom

Analyse media reports and correct any inaccurate or misleading statements. Identify what information is missing and redress this to present a balanced picture. Analysis of a collection of press clippings relating to the Cronulla riots or the Iraq war would be a valuable exercise.

Conduct periodic 'Did-you-know?' exercises in class based on information provided in this collection of Keynotes.

Use whatever opportunities arise in your regular classes to correct misleading statements and to present balanced additional information.

Prepare and display 'Did-you-know?' posters around the school to introduce and present accurate information about Arabic, Muslim and other cultures represented in Australia, particularly those in the news.

Consider a unit of work based on immigration or census data that traces the settlement and demographic history of particular groups. Consider reasons for settlement in particular areas and supports needed.

Ensure that the broad range of cultural and religious origins of migrants to Australia pre and post-European settlement are acknowledged. Ensure that students are reminded of the displacement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples when teaching about European settlement of Australia.

For further classroom activities related to Islam see Keynote 6.

Bibliography

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