Historical Background

In the nineteenth century, young male Macedonians traditionally left their homeland to earn money. Following the introduction of migration quotas by the United States of America in the early 1920s, many of these ‘pechalbari’ came to Australia. Many were from peasant backgrounds who travelled around Australia in small labour groups earning and saving to provide for families in their home country. Some later brought their families out to settle in Australia.

Many Macedonians worked in the market garden industry, while others worked in eucalyptus oil distillation plants near Canberra and dairy farming in Victoria and New South Wales. Some found jobs at the steelworks on the east coast at Port Kembla and Newcastle which later became big centres of Macedonian settlement through chain migration.

In the 1960s, in response to rising unemployment, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia permitted its citizens to seek employment abroad. This resulted in the migration of almost 100,000 Yugoslavs to Australia between 1961 and 1976.

Prior to 1996, the Australian Census categorised people from the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia as Yugoslavia-born. With the break-up of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1991, those from the newly independent country were separately counted from the 2001 Census under the name former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia* up to the 2016 Census.

People born in the Republic of North Macedonia mostly arrived prior to 1990 but small numbers continue to migrate to Australia.

*The Republic of North Macedonia adopted its current name in February 2019, following the resolution of a 27-year old dispute with Greece over its name. The Australian Government has adopted this naming convention. The name ‘former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia’ was used in the 2016 Census, consistent with UN practice, but is no longer used by the Australian Government.

2016 Census

Geographic Distribution

The latest Census in 2016 recorded 38,985 Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia-born people in Australia, a decrease of 3.1 per cent from the 2011 Census.

The 2016 distribution by State and Territory showed Victoria had the largest number with 17,631 followed by New South Wales (16,501), Western Australia (3,058) and Queensland (953).
Age and Sex

The median age of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia-born in 2016 was 59 years compared with 44 years for all overseas-born and 38 years for the total Australian population.

The age distribution showed 0.8 per cent were aged 0-14 years, 2.3 per cent were 15-24 years, 18.0 per cent were 25-44 years, 44.0 per cent were 45-64 years and 34.9 per cent were 65 years and over.

Of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia-born in Australia, there were 19,291 males (49.5 per cent) and 19,690 females (50.5 per cent). The sex ratio was 98 males per 100 females.

Ancestry

In the 2016 Census, the top ancestry responses* that Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia-born people reported were Macedonian (35,693), Albanian (1,797) and Australian (584).

In the 2016 Census, Australians reported over 300 different ancestries. Of the total ancestry responses* 98,441 responses were towards Macedonian ancestry.

* At the 2016 Census up to two responses per person were allowed for the Ancestry question, therefore there can be more responses than total persons.

Language

The main languages spoken at home by Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia-born people in Australia were Macedonian (32,670), English (3,439) and Albanian (1,726).

Of the 35,426 Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia-born who spoke a language other than English at home, 73.4 per cent spoke English very well or well, and 25.7 per cent spoke English not well or not at all.
Religion

At the 2016 Census the major religious affiliations amongst Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia-born were Eastern Orthodox (23,549), Christian, nfd (9,458) and Islam (2,199).

Of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia-born, 4.3 per cent stated 'No Religion' which was lower than that of the total Australian population (29.6 per cent), and 2.7 per cent did not state a religion.

Arrival

Compared to 61.8 per cent of the total overseas-born population, 90.1 per cent of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia-born people in Australia arrived in Australia prior to 2007.

Among the total Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia-born in Australia at the 2016 Census, 3.4 per cent arrived between 2007 and 2011 and 3.1 per cent arrived between 2012 and 2016.

Median Income

At the time of the 2016 Census, the median Individual Weekly Income for the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia-born in Australia aged 15 years and over was $469, compared with $615 for all overseas-born and $688 for all Australian-born.

The total Australian population aged 15 and over had a median Individual Weekly Income of $662.
Qualifications

At the 2016 Census, 35.5 per cent of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia-born aged 15 years and over had some form of higher non-school qualification compared to 60.1 per cent of the Australian population.

Of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia-born aged 15 years and over, 1.7 per cent had no qualifications and were still attending an educational institution. The corresponding rate for the total Australian population was 8.5 per cent.

Employment

Among Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia-born people aged 15 years and over, the participation rate in the labour force was 47.4 per cent and the unemployment rate was 5.3 per cent.

The corresponding rates in the total Australian population were 64.6 per cent and 6.9 per cent respectively.

Of the 17,123 Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia-born who were employed, 34.0 per cent were employed in either a skilled managerial, professional or trade occupation. The corresponding rate in the total Australian population was 48.8 per cent.

Produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics for the Department of Home Affairs

All data used in this summary is sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics Census of Population and Housing.

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