



# Sri Lanka-born Community Information Summary

## 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 Lankans, were admitted to Australia. Sri Lankan migrants at this time included Tamils, Sinhalese, as well as Burghers.

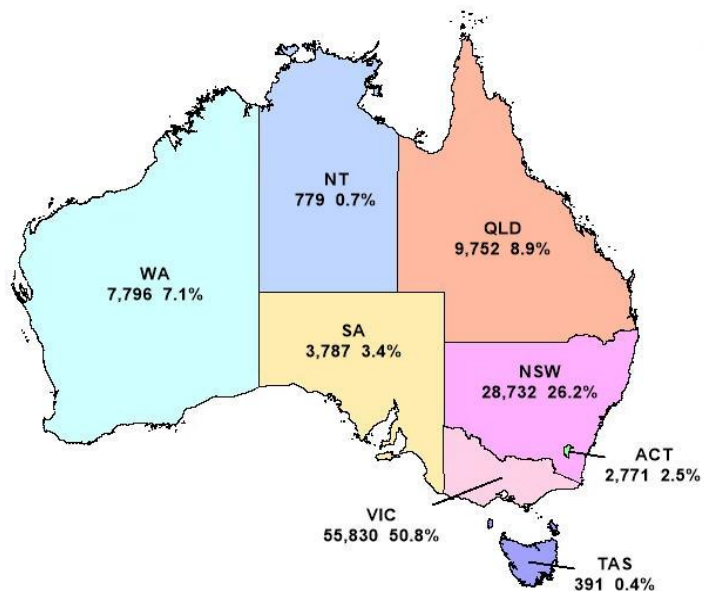
In the following decades, the number of Sri Lankans entering Australia increased. Many who fled the conflict in Sri Lanka between Tamil separatists and Sinhalese arrived as humanitarian entrants. Additionally, there was also significant migration of Sri Lankans under the Skilled and Family migration programs.

## 2016 Census

### Geographic Distribution

The latest Census in 2016 recorded 109,849 Sri Lanka-born people in Australia, an increase of 27.1 per cent from the 2011 Census.

The 2016 distribution by State and Territory showed Victoria had the largest number with 55,830 followed by New South Wales (28,732), Queensland (9,752) and Western Australia (7,796).

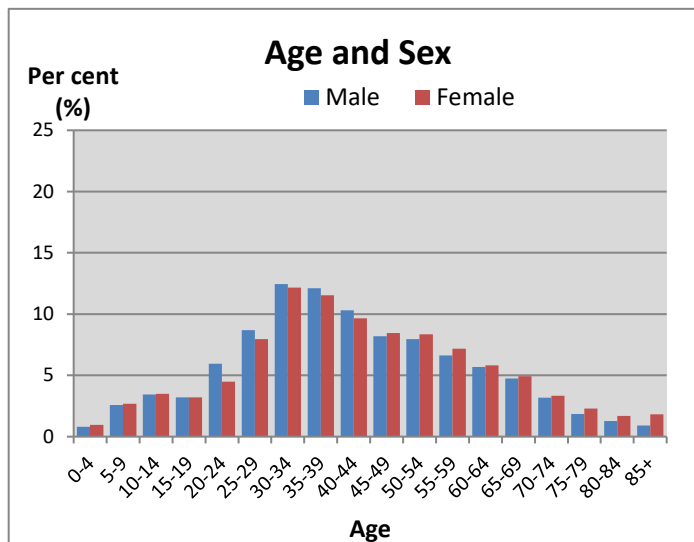


## Age and Sex

The median age of the Sri Lanka-born in 2016 was 40 years compared with 44 years for all overseas-born and 38 years for the total Australian population.

The age distribution showed 7.0 per cent were aged 0-14 years, 8.5 per cent were 15-24 years, 42.5 per cent were 25-44 years, 29.1 per cent were 45-64 years and 13.0 per cent were 65 years and over.

Of the Sri Lanka-born in Australia, there were 57,280 males (52.1 per cent) and 52,573 females (47.9 per cent). The sex ratio was 109 males per 100 females.

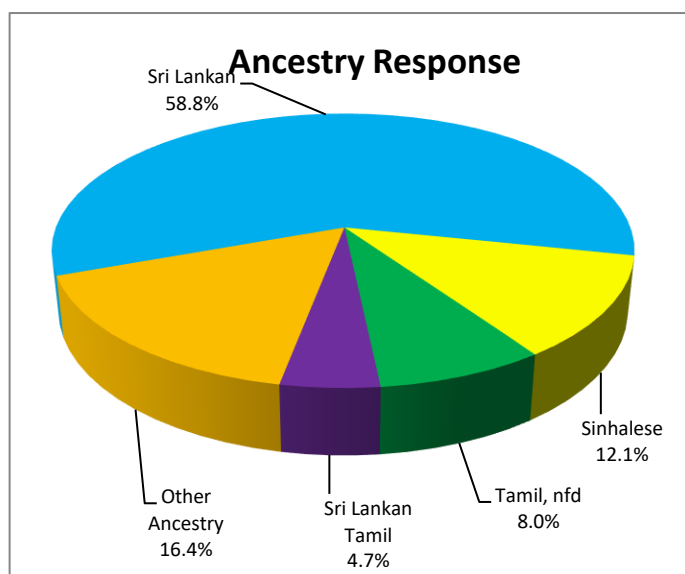


## Ancestry

In the 2016 Census, the top ancestry responses\* that Sri Lanka-born people reported were Sri Lankan (70,375), Sinhalese (14,447) and Tamil, nfd (9,570).

In the 2016 Census, Australians reported over 300 different ancestries. Of the total ancestry responses\* 110,917 responses were towards Sri Lankan ancestry.

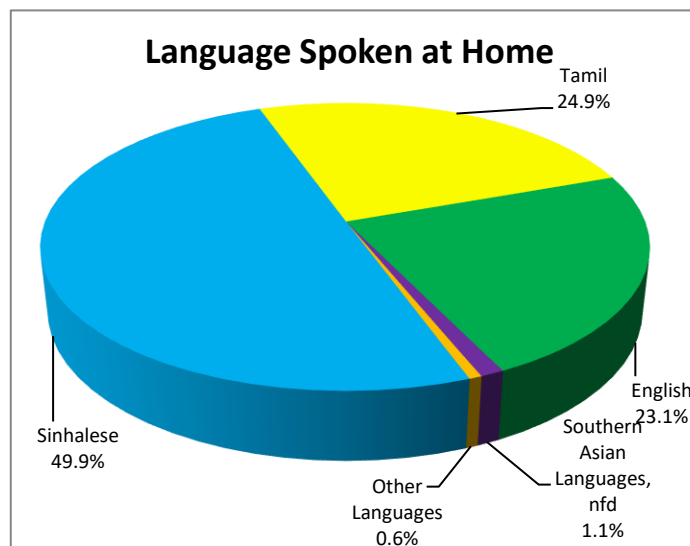
\* At the 2016 Census up to two responses per person were allowed for the Ancestry question, therefore there can be more responses than total persons.



## Language

The main languages spoken at home by Sri Lanka-born people in Australia were Sinhalese (54,762), Tamil (27,348) and English (25,352).

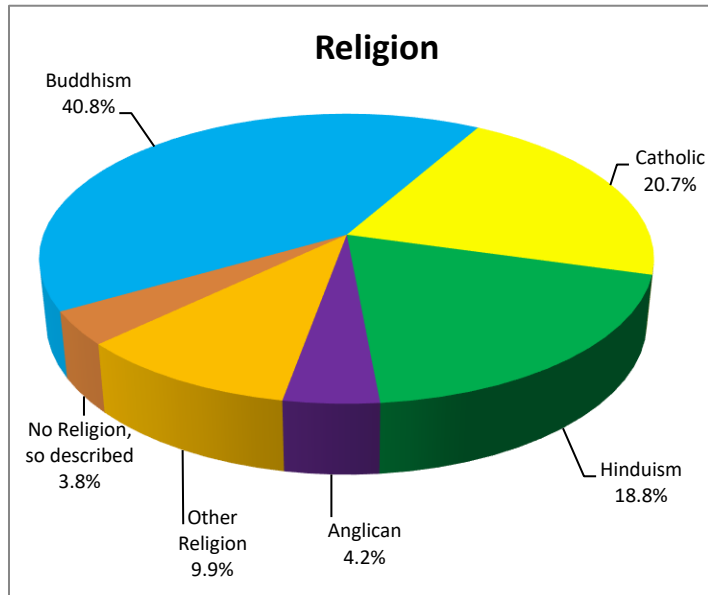
Of the 84,190 Sri Lanka-born who spoke a language other than English at home, 92.0 per cent spoke English very well or well, and 7.4 per cent spoke English not well or not at all.



## Religion

At the 2016 Census the major religious affiliations amongst Sri Lanka-born were Buddhism (44,784), Catholic (22,778) and Hinduism (20,634).

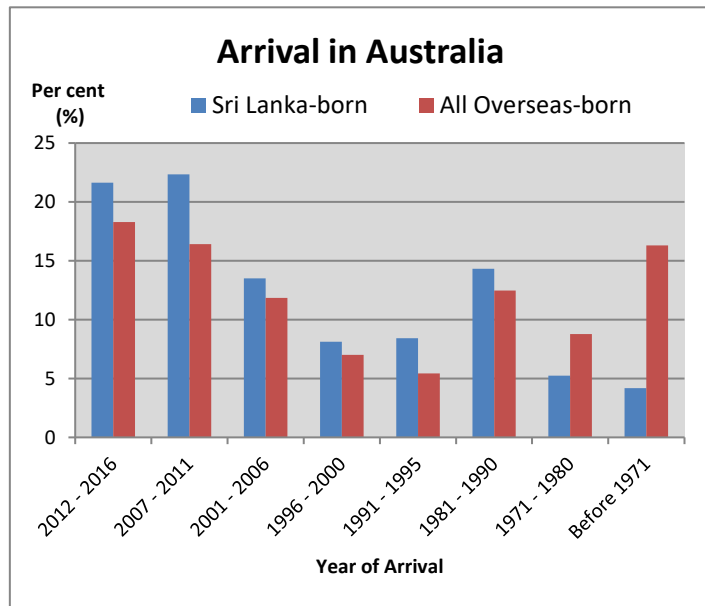
Of the Sri Lanka-born, 3.8 per cent stated 'No Religion' which was lower than that of the total Australian population (29.6 per cent), and 1.7 per cent did not state a religion.



## Arrival

Compared to 61.8 per cent of the total overseas-born population, 53.8 per cent of the Sri Lanka-born people in Australia arrived in Australia prior to 2007.

Among the total Sri Lanka-born in Australia at the 2016 Census, 22.3 per cent arrived between 2007 and 2011 and 21.6 per cent arrived between 2012 and 2016.



## Median Income

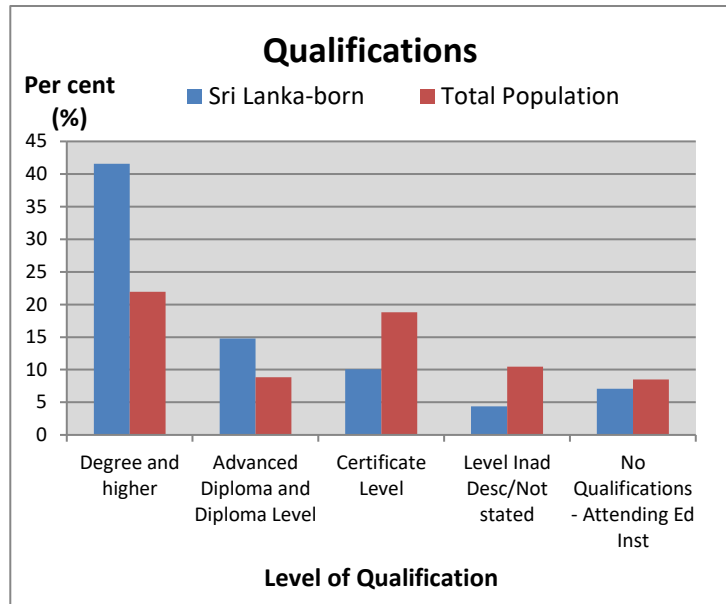
At the time of the 2016 Census, the median Individual Weekly Income for the Sri Lanka-born in Australia aged 15 years and over was \$757, compared with \$615 for all overseas-born and \$688 for all Australian-born.

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

### Qualifications

At the 2016 Census, 70.8 per cent of the Sri Lanka-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 Sri Lanka-born aged 15 years and over, 7.1 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.

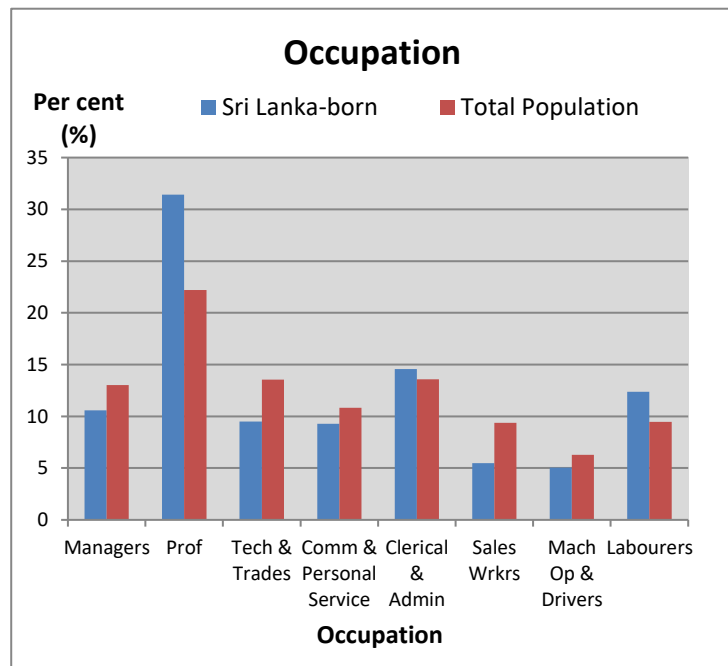


### Employment

Among Sri Lanka-born people aged 15 years and over, the participation rate in the labour force was 71.9 per cent and the unemployment rate was 8.4 per cent.

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

Of the 66,611 Sri Lanka-born who were employed, 51.5 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.