

ETHNIC GROUPS

Australia is one of the world's most **ethnically diverse** countries. One in four people were born overseas, some 200 languages are spoken and around 100 000 new immigrants arrive each year from 170 countries. But it was not always so.

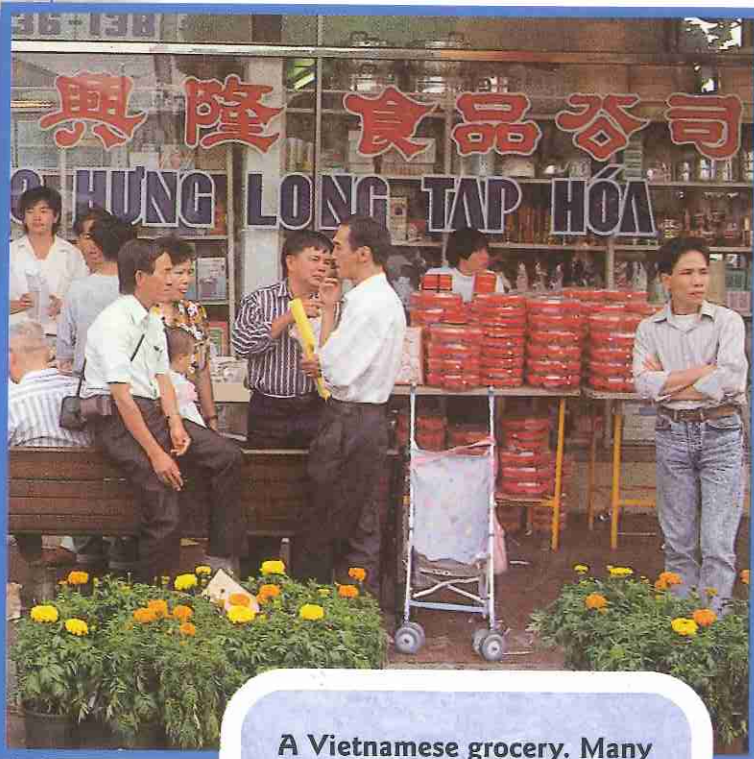
The first migrants

The first immigrants to Australia were convicts, mostly from England and Ireland. This **Anglo-Celtic ethnic group** formed the dominant (main) culture from 1788 to 1850. The discovery of gold in 1851 led to 50 000 newcomers arriving every year, many of them Chinese. Through hard work they were often very successful when it came to finding gold. Other goldminers resented this, and riots led to the first **immigration restrictions** on non-whites.

The White Australia Policy

The 1901 *Immigration Restriction Act* introduced the infamous dictation test. Non-whites wishing to enter Australia first had to pass a written test in any European language chosen by the testers. Almost everyone failed. The Act was

popular in Australia, however, where fear of the 'yellow peril' – large Asian populations to the north – led to widespread racism. The White Australia Policy was gradually dismantled after World War II, when labour shortages led the government to encourage immigrants from some non-European countries. The dictation test was abolished in 1958. In 1973, the Labor government under Prime Minister Gough Whitlam finally removed race from the immigrant selection process.



A Vietnamese grocery. Many ethnic groups have set up small businesses, transforming Australia's inner cities.



Greek Australians perform a traditional dance at a cultural festival.

Multiculturalism

The idea of **multiculturalism** arose in 1972 with immigration minister Al Grassby. He encouraged the preservation of ethnic languages, cultures and traditions, along with loyalty to Australian values. Since then the idea has won widespread acceptance. The government funds a host of ethnic activities, including arts festivals and support services. Today, Australia is regarded as a **tolerant** society, where many ethnic groups live and mix together.

'New Australians'

New Zealanders make up the largest migrant group in Australia. The wave of immigration following World War II brought large numbers of Italians, Greeks, Dutch, Maltese, Yugoslavs, Turks and Lebanese. These 'New Australians' travelled cheaply under the government's 'assisted passage' scheme during the 1950s and 1960s. Many settled in low-cost inner city suburbs, set up businesses and succeeded. Since 1975, many Indo-Chinese (mainly Vietnamese), South Africans, Chinese and Indonesians have arrived. These ethnic groups swelled the population from seven million in 1945 to 20 million today. They transformed Australia from an English-Irish outpost into a vibrant, complex culture.

Boat people

When the **communists** won the Vietnam War in 1975, many Vietnamese who had supported the losing side fled the country. Some risked sailing in leaky boats to Australia. These refugees became known as 'boat people'. In contrast to today's immigration policies, under which asylum seekers are imprisoned on arrival, the boat people were accepted and given help to settle. Today, around 160 000 Vietnamese make up the third-largest ethnic group in the country.