

European immigration

Today, we think of Australia as a multicultural nation, but from 1788 until 1947, most immigrants to Australia came from Britain and Ireland.

The British were the first Europeans to settle in Australia. While other people from Europe and Asia did arrive in Australia in the 1800s, most of them left again or were **assimilated** into the 'British' culture that dominated Australia at the time.

The White Australia policy

After Federation in 1901, the new Australian Government passed laws to limit immigration, which made it almost impossible for people with non-European backgrounds to enter Australia. In fact, many Asian and Pacific Islander people already living in Australia were forced to leave the country because they did not already have **citizenship**.

These immigration laws were part of what was known as the 'White Australia policy'. This policy was introduced because Australians were worried about non-British immigrants.

They believed that 'non-white' foreign cultures would threaten Australia's culture. They also thought that foreign workers would take jobs from Australians because foreign workers would accept less money for the same work. The White Australia policy stayed in place until after the end of World War II.



In the early 1900s, the White Australia policy meant that many non-white immigrants could not live in Australia.

'Populate or perish'

At the end of World War II, the Australian Government decided it needed to increase its population.

During the war, the Japanese had come close to invading Australia. The government worried that there weren't enough people in Australia to defend the land if something like this happened again. Australia also needed a larger workforce to expand **industries** and develop the nation. Using the **slogan** 'populate or perish', the government declared

that immigration was the best way to boost numbers quickly.

The Australian Government still favoured British and Irish immigrants, but there were not enough of them to meet the country's needs. There were, however, thousands of other Europeans who needed a new start after the war.

In 1947, Australia agreed to settle 12000 **displaced** persons, mostly from northern and eastern Europe. More soon followed.

Immigrant's country of origin	Number of immigrants	% overall immigrants to Australia
1 United Kingdom & Ireland	419946	33.5%
2 Italy	201428	16.1%
3 Germany	162756	13.0%
4 Netherlands	100970	8.1%
5 Greece	55326	4.4%
6 Malta	38113	3.0%
7 Austria	33730	2.7%
8 New Zealand	29649	2.4%
9 United States of America	16982	1.4%
10 Egypt	13430	1.1%
Total (Top 10)	1 072 330	85.7%

Source: Australian Government Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2001

This table shows the 10 largest groups of immigrants to Australia, by country, between 1949 and 1959.