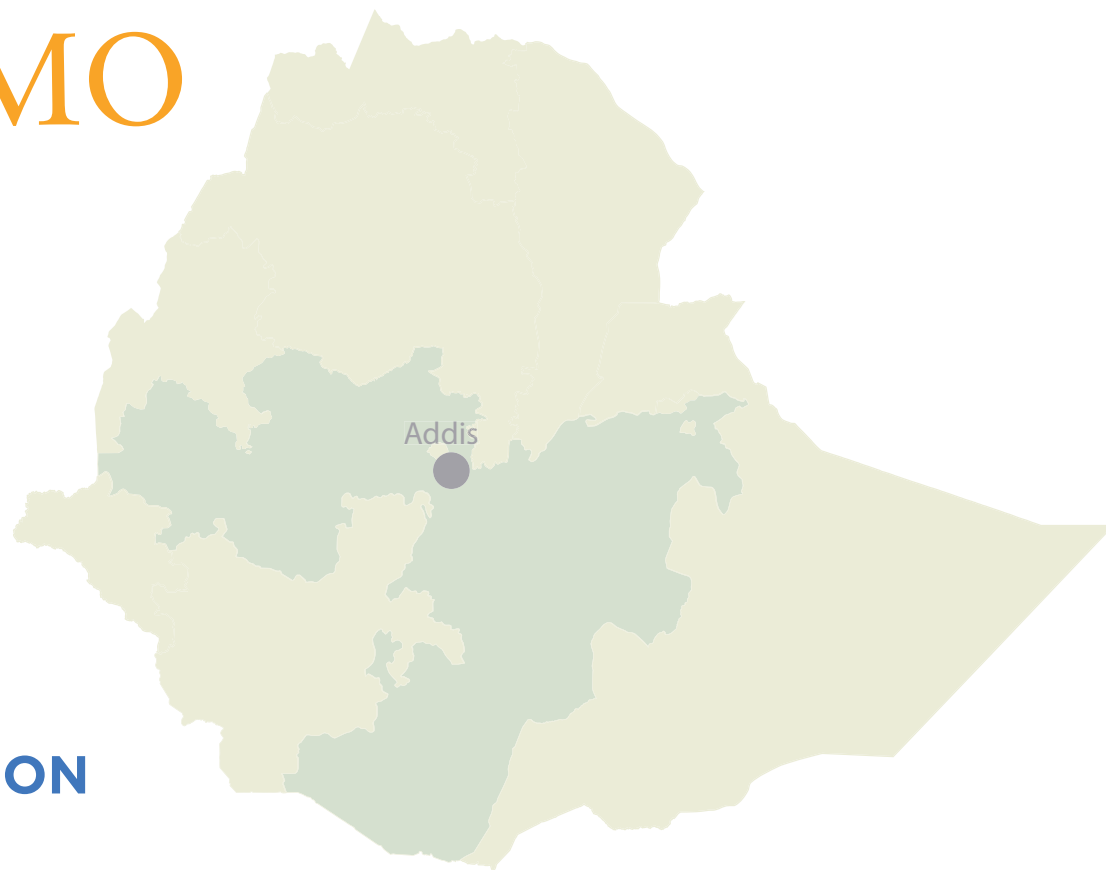


OROMO



INTRODUCTION

The Oromo people represent the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia (34.9%) (CIA 2020). Their homeland is the Oromia regional state, which spreads from South Sudan and Gambela region in the west, to the Somali region in the East and Kenya to the South, making Oromia the largest region in Ethiopia.

For over a century the Oromo people have been oppressed and marginalised by the Ethiopian central government. Ethiopia is the oldest independent country in Africa. It is the only African country to have adopted Christianity long before other Europeans were exposed to it. Aside from a brief Italian occupation from 1936-41, the country was ruled as a dynasty by a series of monarchs until 1974 when Emperor Haile SELASSIE was deposed by a military junta, the Derg, who established a socialist state. Under the new regime, Oromo discontent led a student organisation to start the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), which evolved, over time, into an armed resistance and political advocacy group dedicated to the promotion of Oromo self-determination.

The regime lasted for almost 20 years and in 1991 the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) took power.

Even after a constitution was adopted (1994), and Ethiopia's first multiparty elections were held (1995), intimidation and persecution of Oromo people continued.

The border war with Eritrea in the late 1990s added further tension in the region. After the peace agreement in 2000, Ethiopia troops continued to be stationed in previously contested areas. It was not until 2018, when Oromo prime minister Abiy Ahmed Ali was appointed, that Ethiopia accepted the border ruling of 2000.

Abiy's election represented a new ray of hope for the Oromo people in Ethiopia and overseas. However, arbitrary arrest of journalists and other critics of the government, prolonged detention and unfair trials have not stopped.

For this reason, the Oromo diaspora is actively advocating for peace, an end of human rights abuse and freedoms guaranteed in Ethiopian's constitution

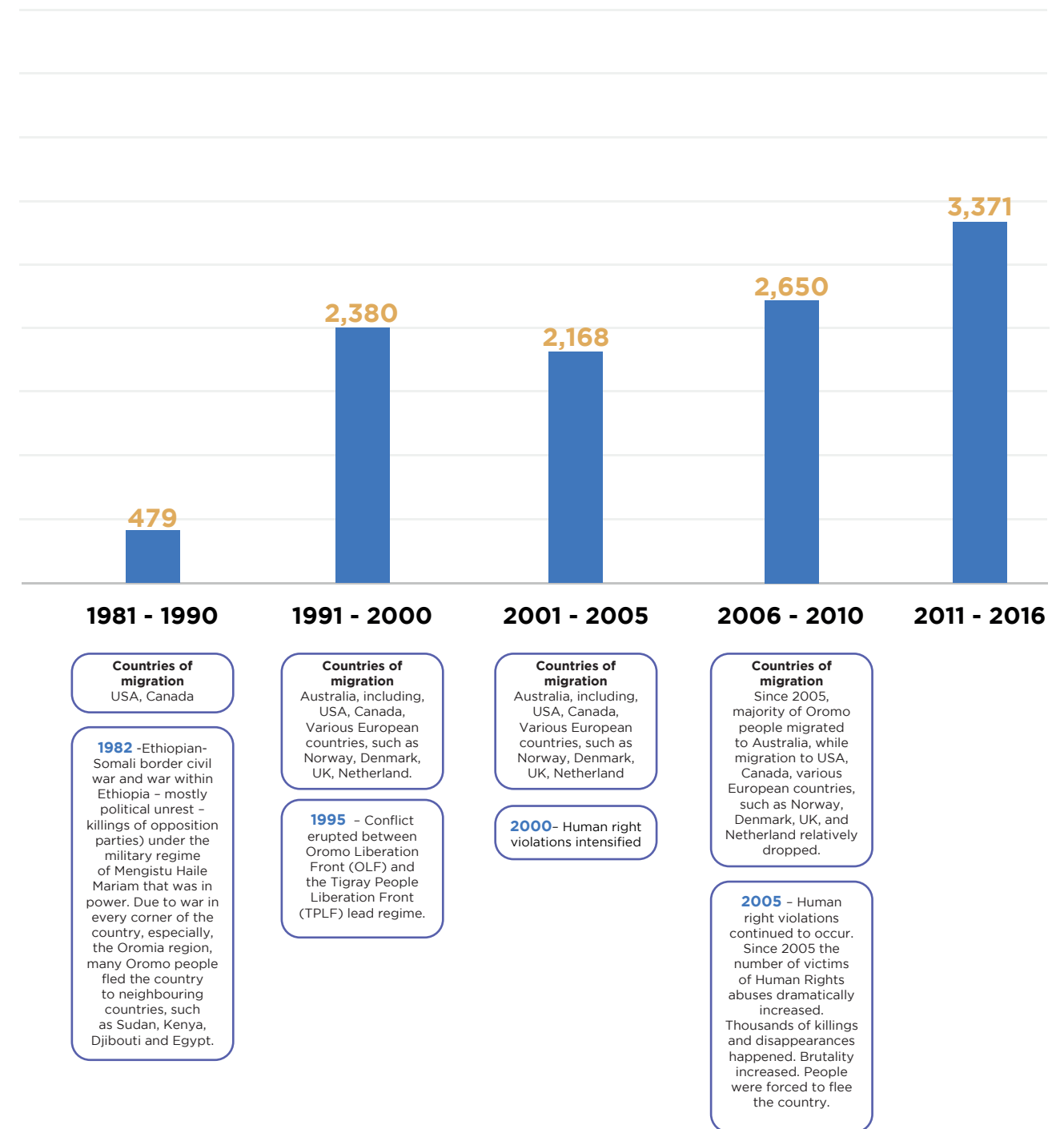
HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF MIGRATION

Oromo people's migration to Australia is linked to the human rights abuses and persecution endured in Ethiopia.

Migration from Oromia to Australia spiked in the mid-90s due to the eruption of conflict between Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and the Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF) lead regime.

The second big wave of immigration occurred after 2005, again connected to continuing human rights abuse and internal conflict. The Oromo immigration has grown steadily as the people's safety and security continued to threaten their livelihood in Ethiopia.

Migration to Australia



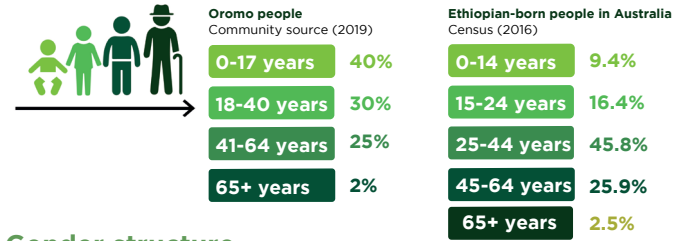
DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIOECONOMIC PROFILE

The demographic and socio-economic profile of the Oromo community in Australia is drawn from census data and community sources (community management, organisation membership, events attendance). Census data refers to Ethiopian-born people and it does not distinguish between different ethnic groups. Community sources, on the other hand, provide an estimate of the Oromo living in Australia, regardless of country of birth. The two Oromo main umbrella organisations (Australian Oromo Community in Victoria Inc. and Oromo Community in Melbourne Inc. – OCM) estimated Oromo living in Australia through their branches in each state – including children, youth, and adults – based on ethnicity. The same way information gathered from other states as well and it refers to 2019.

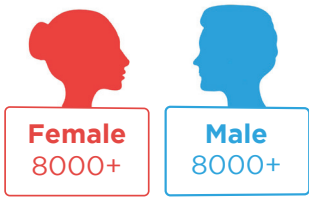
The Census data is used here to give some authenticity and a sense of the demographic characteristics of the Ethiopian-born population in Australia. Albeit there is a disparity between the two data sets, community sources are constantly being updated and they are likely to be more closely descriptive of the demographic and socioeconomic profile of the Oromo.

The last Census recorded **11,792** Ethiopia-born people in Australia, **1,050** of whom are of Oromo ancestry. Australians that reported Ethiopian ancestry were **13,715** (Department of Home Affairs 2018) while community sources approximate the Oromo community in Australia to be more than **15,000**.

Structure by age

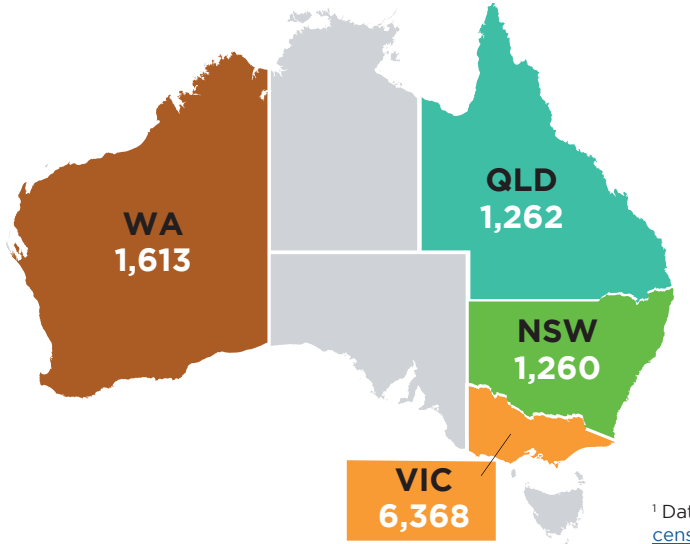


Gender structure



Geographical Distribution

Community sources indicated that Victoria is the state with the largest number of Oromo people, followed by Western Australia, New South Wales, Queensland, Tasmania, ACT, South Australia, and Northern Territory. Within each state, community members tend to concentrate predominantly around the urban areas.



Language

Afaan Oromo

Religion

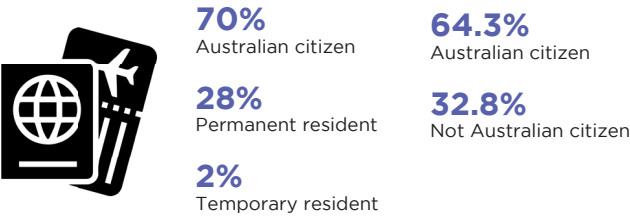
Oromo major religion affiliations are:

- Christianity – Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant (Pentecostal)
- Islam
- Waqefanna: Traditional religion (Ancient monotheistic religion based on spirituality not doctrine)

Reasons to stay in Australia

Safety and security. It is safe to assume that the vast majority of Oromo people in Australia came as refugees. The existing persecution and human rights abuses endured by Oromo people in Ethiopia prevents them to return.

Legal Status



Education Level



60% (Incomplete schooling) more than 9,000 (dropped of school because of conflict, displacement, political unrest (in many regions the detention of teachers and parents etc))

25% (Primary) More than 4,000

10% (Secondary) More than 2,000

5% (University) About 1000

The 2016 census reported that, of the Ethiopia-born living in Australia, 38.1% were attending an educational institution. There were 4.7% in primary school, 8.9% in secondary school and 14.7% in a tertiary or technical institution.

As per 2016 Census, 21.1% of Ethiopia-born people reported having completed Year 12 as their highest level of educational attainment, 16.2% had completed a Certificate III or IV and 11.5% had completed an Advanced Diploma or Diploma.

Professional Activities



20% (3,000+) Work Full-Time

50% (8,000+) Work Part-Time

30% (5,000+) Unemployed

Community sources reported that the majority of Oromo work in the health industry. Other types of occupation are:

- Business owners, such as cafes, grocery shops, variety shops,
- Contractor trades and manual labour
- Factory workers
- Farmers

¹ Data Source: ABS (Census 2016) https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/9207_036

DEGREE AND TYPE OF ORGANIZATION

For the Oromo people in Australia, their identity as Oromo constitutes the strongest bond. Community members gather to celebrate calendar events that are meaningful to the Oromo people regardless of their faith, gender, and place of residence.

In Victoria, under the umbrella of the two main Oromo organisations (Australian Oromo Community in Victoria Inc. and Oromo Community in Melbourne Inc. – OCM), community members congregate and associate in smaller groups (usually incorporated associations) focusing on specific activities, e.g. Women's groups, sport, youth groups.



CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES AND PRIORITIES

Oromo have several ongoing and continuous ties with their home country, particularly through news update and on-going developments, running small businesses and variety shops importing cultural foods, such as coffee and spices as well cultural clothes and artwork and artifacts to Australia.

Connection is kept alive via online channels, such as media outlets, social media, and telephone. Sometimes few people are able to travel for family visit.

Like other diaspora communities, the Oromo regularly send money to individuals or family members for medical treatment, food, children education. It is very rare that the Oromo send items, as it is expensive. The constant requests for support are worrying and stressful, for the Oromo in Australia, and not easy to ignore or avoid.

"It's like the blood circulating in the body, sometimes you get a cut, and we need to keep the blood moving."



The strong bond with the Oromia region also implies that Oromo people are informed and sensitive to the current situation in Ethiopia. The political instability that have characterised Ethiopian politics over the last few decades is a reason for concern to Oromo people in Australia, particularly for those who still have families in Ethiopia.

Political instability, in the case of Ethiopia, is manifested through the centralised control of power that can, and has done so in the past, overrule the Constitution. These concerns are shared by community members of all age insofar as Oromo youth, with no lived experience, are actively advocating for human rights in Ethiopia and share the burden of the older generation. As long as the human rights abuses continue, neither old nor young people can be free.

Through their main organisations, Oromo people advocate for Human Rights and seek the support of international body to put pressure on the Ethiopian government to stop with the abuses and move towards a true democratisation of the country.



OROMIA SUPPORT GROUP AUSTRALIA

Members of the Oromo community in Australia started Oromia Support Group of Australia (OSGA) to advocate for Human Rights in Ethiopia because the community felt that they had no representation and no voice. The OSGA case study explores the struggle and unyielding desire for peace of the Oromo people in Australia, summarising OSGA journey starting from zero to becoming a Human Rights advocate at the international level. The organisation is well connected with its community and has a solid and well organised structure.

In the face of Covid-19 challenges and increased health risks, OSGA promptly responded to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the Oromo people by creating a task force to share information and support vulnerable community members.

"Human rights have no boundaries. Even, sometimes we act like health service advocates. All inclusive."

