



Australian Government  
Department of Home Affairs

# Life in Australia

Australian values and principles

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# Background information

This information is intended for people who are applying for a visa to live in Australia, either permanently or on a temporary basis. It provides an overview of Australia, its history, way of life and the values we share.

Australian values include:

- respect for the freedom and dignity of the individual;
- freedom of religion (including the freedom not to follow a particular religion), freedom of speech, and freedom of association;
- commitment to the rule of law, which means that all people are subject to the law and should obey it;
- parliamentary democracy, whereby our laws are determined by parliaments elected by the people, those laws being paramount and overriding any other inconsistent religious or secular “laws”;
- equality of opportunity for all people, regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, race, or national or ethnic origin;
- a ‘fair go’ for all that embraces
  - mutual respect;
  - tolerance;
  - compassion for those in need;
  - equality of opportunity for all; and
- the English language as the national language, and as an important unifying element of Australian society.

These values are outlined in the **Australian Values Statement**.

## Australian Values Statement

Most visa applicants must sign an Australian Values Statement, acknowledging Australian values and undertaking to act in accordance with them.

Applicants who need to sign an Australian Values Statement will be informed of this when lodging an application. Where a visa application requires that you sign an Australian Values Statement, it will be set out in the application form. The application form will also advise age requirements for signing the Australian Values Statement (this varies depending on the type of application being lodged).

Before signing the Australian Values Statement, applicants are encouraged to have read, or had explained to them, information on values provided by the Australian Government. The information within this booklet will help applicants understand Australian values before they sign the Australian Values Statement.

People currently outside Australia who are applying for a Humanitarian visa are required to sign the Australian Values Statement during an interview. These applicants will not be expected to have read this booklet, as the contents will be explained to them at interview. This different process recognises the difficult circumstances often faced by Humanitarian visa applicants outside Australia.

If you are approved under the offshore Humanitarian Programme, you are encouraged to attend an Australian Cultural Orientation (AUSCO) Programme before leaving for Australia. The AUSCO Programme provides information about travelling to and settling in Australia and is held in various locations in South Asia, South East Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Additional courses are provided in other locations as needed.

The **Australian Values Statement** is as follows:

**For all relevant visa applicants (including temporary visa applicants)**

*I confirm that I have read, or had explained to me, information provided by the Australian Government on Australian society and values.*

*I understand that Australian society values:*

- *respect for the freedom and dignity of the individual;*
- *freedom of religion (including the freedom not to follow a particular religion), freedom of speech, and freedom of association;*
- *commitment to the rule of law, which means that all people are subject to the law and should obey it;*
- *parliamentary democracy whereby our laws are determined by parliaments elected by the people, those laws being paramount and overriding any other inconsistent religious or secular “laws”;*
- *equality of opportunity for all people, regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, race, or national or ethnic origin;*
- *a ‘fair go’ for all that embraces:*
  - *mutual respect;*
  - *tolerance;*
  - *compassion for those in need;*
  - *equality of opportunity for all;*
- *the English language as the national language, and as an important unifying element of Australian society.*

*I undertake to conduct myself in accordance with these values of Australian society during my stay in Australia and to obey the laws of Australia.*

**For permanent visa applicants, the above, plus:**

*I undertake to make reasonable efforts to learn the English language, if it is not my native language.*

*I understand that, if in the future I meet the legal qualifications for becoming an Australian citizen and my application is approved, I will need to pledge my loyalty to Australia and its people.*

If you are lodging a paper application form, you will need to sign the Australian Values Statement.

For online applications, the main visa applicant will be asked to ‘agree’ to the Australian Values Statement. If the online application includes dependant applicants who have reached a certain age, the main visa applicant will also need to agree that any secondary applicants have been advised of, and agree to, the Australian Values Statement. In these circumstances, the main visa applicant is making the statement on behalf of themselves and their dependants.

# Australian Values and Principles

Australia's shared values, based on freedom, respect, fairness and equality of opportunity, are central to our community remaining a secure, prosperous and peaceful place to live and have helped Australia to become one of the world's most successful multicultural societies.

While shared to some extent by many other countries, these values have been adapted to Australia's unique setting, shaped through the settlement in Australia of millions of people from all over the world. Although they may be expressed differently by different people, their meaning remains the same. These values define and shape our country and culture and are a reason why so many people want to become Australian.

Australia's first inhabitants were the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, who have the oldest continuous cultures and traditions in the world. The first migrants were mostly from Britain and Ireland and this Anglo-Celtic heritage has been a significant and continuing influence on Australia's history, culture and political traditions. Subsequent immigration waves have brought people from all around the world, all of whom have made their own unique contributions to Australia and its way of life.

The statement of shared values does not seek to make everyone the same with the same beliefs. These values have been promoted and discussed by Australians over many years and have helped Australia to welcome millions of people from many ethnic groups and traditions.

The aim is to help new residents and prospective Australian citizens understand the basic values that have helped to create and sustain our successful multicultural society. In Australia, people have many freedoms. However, everyone is required to obey Australia's laws, which have been put in place by democratically elected governments to maintain an orderly, free and safe society.

## Our values

### Respect for the freedom and dignity of the individual

In Australia, individuals must respect the freedom and dignity of others, and their opinions and choices.

It is against the law to be violent towards another person. Violence of any kind, including verbal and physical abuse, is illegal. Australians believe in peaceful disagreement and above all the right to be safe and free from violence and intimidation.

### Freedom of religion

Australia has no official national religion and people in Australia are free to follow any religion they choose. The government treats all citizens equally, whatever their religion or beliefs. However, religious practices must not break Australian laws. People in Australia may also choose not to follow a religion.

Religious laws have no legal status in Australia. Australian law must be followed by everyone in Australia, including where it is different from religious laws.

Religious intolerance is not acceptable in Australian society. All people should be provided equal opportunity to pursue their goals and interests regardless of their ethnicity or religion as long as they are obeying Australian law.

### Freedom of speech

People in Australia should be able to express their ideas freely, so long as it is within the law. In Australia, people are free to meet in public or private places for social or political discussion. People are also free to say and write what they think about any topic and to discuss their ideas with others. Newspapers, television and radio outlets have the same freedom.

It is never acceptable to promote violence against another person or group of people (such as because of their culture, ethnicity, religion or background) because it is against Australian values and law. It is also illegal to make false allegations or encourage others to break the law. Other people's freedom of speech and freedom of expression must be respected, as long as such expression is lawful.

### **Freedom of association**

In Australia, people are free to join or leave any group voluntarily as long as it is within the law. People are free to join any legal organisation, such as a political party, trade union, religious, cultural or social group. Individuals cannot be compelled to join an organisation or forced to leave it.

Australians can gather freely with others, including to protest against a government action or an organisation. Australians are allowed to peacefully protest against the actions of the government, because tolerance of peaceful public protest is an essential part of democracy. However, all protests must be within the law. This means they must be peaceful, and must not injure any person or damage property.

### **Commitment to the Rule of Law**

All Australians are protected by our laws and legal systems. Australians recognise the importance of laws in maintaining a peaceful and orderly society.

Under the Rule of Law, all Australians are equal in relation to the law and no person or group is above the law. In Australia, everybody should obey the law and not break it at any time, otherwise you will face penalties. You should follow the law even if no one is watching.

Australian laws apply to all people in Australia. This means regardless of your background or culture, you must follow Australian laws.

### **Parliamentary democracy**

Australia's system of government is a parliamentary democracy. Our laws are determined by parliaments elected by the people. This means that Australian citizens are involved in how the country is governed. The power of the government comes from the Australian people because Australian citizens vote for people to represent them in parliament.

### **Equality of opportunity for all people**

Australian society values the equal rights of all people, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, race, or national or ethnic origin. There are a number of laws in Australia that protect a person from being treated differently from others.

The law is applied in Australia so that people from different backgrounds are not given preferential treatment.

Men and women have equal rights in Australia and should be provided equality of opportunity to pursue their goals and interests. It is against the law to discriminate against a person because of their gender.

Both men and women have the right to make their own independent choices about personal matters, such as marriage and religion, and are protected by the law from intimidation or violence.

### **A 'fair go' for all**

In Australia, we believe that everyone deserves a 'fair go' and people should not be limited by any kind of class distinction. Everyone, regardless of their background, is given an equal opportunity to achieve success in life. Ensuring that everyone has the same legal rights is an important aspect of fairness in Australian society. What someone achieves in life should be a result of their hard work and talents.

Many new migrants in Australia have become leaders in business, their profession, the arts, public service and sport through their hard work and enterprise.

### **Mutual Respect and tolerance for others**

Australia values the principles of mutual respect and tolerance. This means listening to others and respecting their views and opinions, even when they are different from your own. People should be tolerant of each other where they find that they disagree.

Racism has no place in Australia. This includes creating or sharing racially offensive material on the internet or other publications and making racially abusive comments in a public place or at a sporting event.

If you experience racism, you can also make a complaint to the Australian Human Rights Commission.

**See:** [Human Rights Commission](#).

### **Compassion for those in need**

Australians value 'mateship'. We help each other in times of need. For example, this might mean taking a meal to an elderly neighbour, driving a friend to a medical appointment, or visiting someone who is sick, frail or lonely.

In this spirit of mateship, Australia has a strong tradition of community service and volunteering — to look out for each other and strengthen the community. Volunteering is a great opportunity to share knowledge, learn new skills, and increase your integration into and sense of belonging to the Australian community. There are many opportunities to volunteer in Australia.

### **English as the national language**

Australian society values the English language as the national language of Australia, and as an important unifying element of society. People living in Australia should make an effort to learn English.

It is important to learn to speak English because it helps to get an education, a job, and better integrate into the community. It is essential for economic participation and social cohesion.

## **Australian society today**

One of the defining features of Australian society today is the cultural diversity of its people and the extent to which they are united by an overriding and unifying commitment to Australia.

Another defining feature is the democratic nature of Australian society. This does not mean that everyone is the same or that everybody has equal wealth or property. It means that with hard work and commitment, people without high-level connections or influential patrons can succeed.

Within the framework of Australia's laws, all Australians are able to express their culture and beliefs and to participate freely in Australia's national life. Australia holds firmly to the belief that no-one should be disadvantaged on the basis of their country of birth, cultural heritage, language, gender or religious belief.

In order to maintain a stable, peaceful and prosperous community, Australians of all backgrounds are expected to uphold the shared principles and values that underpin Australian society.

## Laws and social customs

Community behaviour in Australia is governed by a combination of formal laws and informal social customs.

All people in Australia must obey the nation's laws or face the possibility of criminal and civil prosecution. People are also expected to generally observe Australian social customs, habits and practices even though they are not normally legally binding.

Australian laws are made by the Australian Commonwealth, state and territory parliaments. The police have the job of keeping peace and order in the community and to bring people they believe have broken the law before courts of law. People in their local communities and neighbourhoods also help each other in the event of trouble and report anything unusual or suspicious to the local police station.

Australia has a national police force called the Australian Federal Police, which investigates crimes against federal laws including drug trafficking, illegal immigration, crimes against national security and crimes against the environment. All states of Australia and the Northern Territory have their own police forces, which deal with crimes under state or territory laws. Policing in the Australian Capital Territory is undertaken by the Australian Federal Police.

Although police officers may arrest people and give evidence in court, they do not make the final decision on whether or not people are guilty of crimes. This is decided by the courts.

Police and the community strive to maintain good relations in Australia. You can report crimes and seek assistance from the police. If you are questioned by police, remain calm, be polite and cooperative with any lawful requests they may make.

## Character requirements

The focus of the Australian Government is on keeping communities safe and ensuring the wellbeing of all Australians. Entry and stay in Australia is a privilege not a right. The Government does not tolerate behaviour which is criminal or poses a risk to the safety or good order of the Australian community. Those who choose to break the law and fail to uphold the standards expected by the Australian community should expect to lose the privilege of remaining in Australia. Migrants may have their visa or citizenship refused or cancelled if they do not pass the character test.

A non-citizen may fail to pass the character test in a number of ways, including if the person has:

- a substantial criminal record, which includes being sentenced to more than 12 months imprisonment, or
- been convicted of child sex offences, or
- there is a risk that the person, if they were allowed to enter or to remain in Australia, would endanger the Australian community or a segment of the community.

A person who has had their visa cancelled is removed from Australia as soon as reasonably practicable. They may be excluded, in some cases permanently, from returning to Australia.

## Domestic and Family violence

Everyone has the right to experience positive and safe relationships with their families, friends and loved ones. Violence towards another person is illegal in Australia and is a very serious crime. This includes violence within the home and within marriage, known as domestic or family violence. Domestic and family violence includes behaviour or threats that aim to control a partner by causing fear or threatening their safety. Domestic and family violence can include hitting, isolating a family member from friends and family, or threatening children or pets. Domestic and family violence is not accepted and is against the law.

A person who commits these crimes can go to jail, whether they are a man or a woman. No one should accept being treated badly or harmed.

If you or someone you know is in danger you should contact the police.

**See:** [respect](#) and [1800respect](#)

### **Discrimination on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, age or disability**

Commonwealth laws prohibit discrimination on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, age and disability in a range of areas of public life under the Sex Discrimination Act 1984, the Age Discrimination Act 2004 and the Disability Discrimination Act 1992. The Australian Human Rights Commission is responsible for handling complaints under these laws.

**See:** [Human Rights Commission](#).

### **Online safety**

Online abuse is not accepted in Australia. This is sometimes called cyber abuse. Examples include sharing sexual photos or videos online without consent, stalking a person online, or making racially abusive comments about a person online. Many forms of cyber abuse are illegal in Australia.

**See:** [esafety](#)

### **Australian workplace rights**

People working in Australia, including both sponsored and non-sponsored visa holders, have rights and protections at work. These cannot be taken away by contracts.

Minimum pay rates and workplace conditions are set by Australian law.

The Australian Fair Work Ombudsman's visa holders and migrants webpage provides information on what you need to know before you start work, pay rates, leave arrangements and employee entitlements.

**See:** [Visa holders & migrants](#)

The Fair Work Ombudsman can give you further information and advice about your workplace rights and obligations, and has workplace information translated into different languages.

**See:** [Fair Work Ombudsman](#)

## **More information**

The *Beginning a Life in Australia* booklet provides helpful settlement information and links to other websites and resources for newly arrived migrants, humanitarian entrants, and their sponsors and service providers.

**See:** [Beginning a Life in Australia](#)