

## Sri Lankan Cultural Profile

**PLEASE NOTE:** This profile provides an overview of some of the cultural information relating to the diverse groups of Sri Lankan people who live in the Eastern Region of Melbourne. This description may not apply to all people as individual experiences may vary. However this profile can be used as a guide to some of the issues that may concern your clients.

### Introduction:

- The Sri Lankan-born community in Australia is made up of three main ethnic groups; the British, Dutch and Portuguese, collectively known as Burghers who are the direct descendants of Europeans during colonial times, and the Sinhalese and Tamil communities. The majority of Sri Lankan people in Australia live in Victoria and New South Wales.
- The Sri Lankan-born population are mostly from urban backgrounds with high education levels and work in professional occupations. More recently moderately educated, less affluent migrants from rural areas have arrived in Australia. These migrants are predominately para-professionals, such as mechanics meeting the changing economic, technical and professional needs of Australia and family members immigrating under the family reunion category.
- There are also Tamil speaking people in Australia from a number of countries including Southern India, Malaysia, Singapore, Burma, Vietnam, Cambodia and South East Asian countries.
- This cultural profile will look at the broad cultural factors of these three main groups, remembering that they are very different.

### Migration:

- From 1948 to late 1960's, most Sri Lankan-born migrants to Australia were British subjects many of them were British, Dutch and Portuguese descendants. These British subjects began immigrating when Sri Lanka (previously Ceylon) became independent as many suffered a massive loss in social, political and economic influence in Sri Lanka.
- Tamil speaking students arrived from Sri Lanka under the Colombo Plan after the Second World War.
- In the 1970s mainly Sinhalese and Tamil professionals migrated to Australia due to political unrest and for increased economic opportunities, migrating directly from Sri Lanka and from second countries such as England, America, New Zealand and Singapore.
- Migrants from Sri Lanka in the 1980s were mainly Tamil speaking. They mainly arrived as humanitarian entrants, later sponsoring family members under the family reunion program.
- Today migration continues from Sri Lanka to Australia under the refugee, family and skilled migration programs.

## Local Demographics: Sri Lankan-born residents in the Eastern Region

Local Government Area	Total Sri Lankan-born Population	50-59 years	60-69 years	70-79 years	80 years and over	Total number of Sri Lankan-born people aged 65 and over	People aged 65+ as a % of the Sri Lankan-born population
City of Boroondara	1,218	155	71	50	25	113	9%
City of Knox	2,903	426	293	89	51	251	9%
City of Manningham	638	84	74	37	26	88	14%
City of Maroondah	595	69	43	25	11	52	8%
City of Monash	5,616	628	409	177	111	463	8%
City of Whitehorse	1,910	151	160	58	40	160	8%
Shire of Yarra Ranges	282	36	26	12	0	24	9%
Eastern Region	13,162	1,549	1,076	448	264	1,166	9%

(ABS Census 2016)

- At the 2016 Census, there were 55,830 Sri Lankan-born persons in Victoria (ABS 2016).
- The median age of the Sri Lankan-born population is 40 compared to 37 years for the total Victorian population (ABS 2016).

## Language: Sinhalese-speaking people in the Eastern Region

Local Government Area	Total number of people speaking Sinhalese at home	50-59 years	60-69 years	70-79 years	80 years and over	Total number of Sinhalese speaking people aged 65 and over	Sinhalese speaking people aged 65+ as a % of the Sinhalese speaking population
City of Boroondara	647	89	37	24	12	60	9%
City of Knox	2,079	349	186	54	26	151	7%
City of Manningham	280	46	34	9	4	32	11%
City of Maroondah	421	43	34	9	4	28	7%
City of Monash	4,643	521	262	122	33	264	6%
City of Whitehorse	1,406	88	92	29	9	86	6%
Shire of Yarra Ranges	136	13	9	6	6	12	9%
Eastern Region	9,612	1,149	654	253	94	633	7%

(ABS Census 2016)

## Language: Tamil-speaking people in the Eastern Region

Local Government Area	Total number of people speaking Tamil at home	50-59 years	60-69 years	70-79 years	80 years and over	Total number of Tamil speaking people aged 65 and over	Tamil speaking people aged 65+ as a % of the Tamil speaking population
City of Boroondara	595	62	42	25	12	52	9%
City of Knox	1,108	204	138	44	21	132	12%
City of Manningham	351	43	72	29	8	78	22%
City of Maroondah	142	11	11	8	3	12	8%
City of Monash	2,668	385	315	120	76	330	12%
City of Whitehorse	717	100	111	31	20	98	14%
Shire of Yarra Ranges	44	0	3	0	0	0	0%
Eastern Region	5,625	805	692	257	140	702	12%

(ABS Census 2016)

- The main languages spoken at home by the Sri Lankan-born population in Victoria are English (24.1%), Sinhalese (60%) and Tamil (17.8%) (ABS 2016).
- 4.6% of the Sri Lankan-born population in Victoria identified as speaking English 'not well' and 0.5% spoke English 'not at all' (ABS 2016).
- 45.9% of the Sri Lankan-born population in Victoria assessed themselves as speaking English 'very well' and 24.1% as 'well' (ABS 2016).
- Burghers are English speaking.
- Muslim Sri Lankans are mainly Tamil speaking but they do not share Tamil ideology and customs.
- The three main Sri Lankan languages have been the centre of political controversy since the adoption of Sinhalese as the official language in Sri Lanka in 1956.

## Religion:

- The majority of Sinhalese are Theravada Buddhist with a minority of them being Christians.
- The majority of Tamils are Hindu.
- There is a minority Muslim community that is Tamil-speaking.
- The majority of European descendants (Burghers) are Christians.

## Attitudes and Issues with Ageing:

- Traditionally elderly Sri Lankan people have been supported by their extended family. However this has reduced in recent times.
- Sri Lankan-born people are generally familiar with government provided services and resources for the elderly.
- General barriers to accessing services for the elderly may not be as significant within the Sri Lankan community as English language proficiency is generally higher than other groups and similar services are provided by the government in Sri Lanka.

## Attitudes to Disability and Mental Illness:

- The disabled are perceived negatively in Sri Lanka, often seen as a burden to their families and may be considered omens of bad luck. They are excluded from the social mainstream and find it difficult to access educational opportunities and employment.
- Sri Lankan-born people with a disability in Australia are largely cared for and protected by their family and community.

## Attitudes to Death and Palliative Care:

- For further information please see resource:

Palliative Care for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities: Cultural profiles to assist in providing culturally sensitive Palliative Care, 2009, Migrant Information Centre (Eastern Melbourne), [https://miceastmelb.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Palliative\\_care\\_resource\\_for\\_workersAug2009.pdf](https://miceastmelb.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Palliative_care_resource_for_workersAug2009.pdf)

## Customs / Values:

- Burghers are westernised in language, religion and cultural norms.
- Christian Sinhalese and Tamils who arrived between the 1960s and 1970s are also westernised and have tended to integrate into Australian society.
- The Buddhist Sinhalese and Hindu Tamils who arrived later have made every effort to hold on to their traditions and identity while wanting to integrate into Australian society. Teaching their ethnic language and culture to the younger generation is very important. For many, their ethnic language is still the choice for communication in the home.
- There is a caste system amongst the Tamil and Sinhalese communities but they are not as powerful in Australia and are most influential in marriage arrangements.
- The most important social unit is considered to be the nuclear family, even when extended family members live together. Members of the extended family support the nuclear family.

## Communication Styles:

- Handshaking (soft) has become the norm in Australia, although with older women and orthodox Hindus this may not be acceptable.
- The traditional greeting, of placing ones hands together and bringing them up towards the chest is still practiced.
- Sri Lankan-born people have a respectful and courteous communication style.

## Naming Conventions:

- Most Sinhalese and Tamils usually have two names, a traditional name and one modified version, for life in Australia. The traditional Sinhalese name comprises of several parts. The first name is the House or Tribe name, always ending in “GE”. It is sometimes referred to as the “GE-name” and means ‘of’, and it is not often used in Australia. The second is one or more individual names and third a surname. Women usually adopt their husband’s surname, but also keep their own GE-name on marriage. The Sinhalese usually use an initial to indicate the first name, rather than writing the whole name.
- The Tamil people use their father’s name as the surname first, and their own individual name second. Tamil women take their husband’s first name as their surname on marriage.
- It is important to use titles when addressing elderly Sri Lankan people.

## Health Beliefs and Practices:

- Sri Lankans practices a western model of medicine in conjunction with traditional remedies.
- Herbal remedies are also used, such as Ayurveda, traditional systems of medicine practiced in India and ancient Sri Lanka which places great emphasis on treatment by the use of herbal medicines, aromatherapy, nutrition, massage and meditation to create a balance between the mind and body.

## Greetings:

English Greeting	Sinhala (Closest English Pronunciation)	Tamil (Closest English Pronunciation)
Hello	KO-HA-MA-DA	KAL-AI VAN-A-KAM (good morning) MA-LAI VAN-A-KAM (good evening)
Goodbye	ARE-YOU –BO-ONE	PAAR-KA-LAM
Yes	OH-OO	AAM
No	NAHA / NA	ILLAI
Thankyou	STOO -TEA	NANDRI

## Key Sinhalese Festivals / Significant Dates:

- Duruthu Perahera (First visit of Buddha to Sri Lanka) *Full moon day in January*
- Sinhalese and Hindu New Year Festival *14<sup>th</sup> of April (Solar Calendar)*
- Vesak (Birth, Death & Enlightenment of Buddha) *Full moon day in May*
- Poson (Buddhism brought to Sri Lanka) *June full moon*
- Esala (A month of cultural celebrations) *July / August.*
- Unduvap (Sangamitta's memorial day) *December full moon*

## Key Tamil Festivals / Significant Dates:

- Tamil Hindu New Year Festival *14<sup>th</sup> of April*
- Thai Pongal (Harvest Festival) *14<sup>th</sup> of January*
- Deepavali (Festival of Lights) *November*
  - Victory of good over evil
- Navarathri Festival (Festival of nine nights) *September / October*
  - Day 1, 2, 3 of the festival Hindus pray to Durka (Goddess of Braveness)
  - Day 4, 5, 6 of the festival Hindus pray to Lakshmi (Goddess of Wealth)
  - Day 7, 8, 9 of the festival Hindus pray to Saraswathi (Goddess of Education)

## Key Sri Lankan Festivals / Significant Dates:

- National Day *4<sup>th</sup> of February*
- Kataragama *July / August*

\* For other significant dates related to religious observances, refer to the Hindu, Muslim and Buddhist religious profiles.

## Local services useful for Sri Lankan-born residents in the Eastern Region

### Settlement Services

Provide information, referral and casework for refugees and family migrants who arrived in the last five years.

Name	Address	Contact
Migrant Information Centre (Eastern Melbourne)	Suite 2, Town Hall Hub, 27 Bank Street, Box Hill 3128 and 18 Bond Street, Ringwood 3134	Ph: 9285 4888 (Box Hill) 9870 1351 (Ringwood)
New Hope Foundation	Grattan Gardens Community Centre 40 Grattan Street, Prahran 3181	Ph: 9510 5877

### Aged Care & Disability Support Services

#### **Migrant Information Centre Aged & Disability Services**

Address: Suite 2, Town Hall Hub, 27 Bank Street, Box Hill 3128

Ph: 9275 6901

Email: [wzhang@miceastmelb.com.au](mailto:wzhang@miceastmelb.com.au)

Website: <http://miceastmelb.com.au/our-services/elderly-people-younger-people-disabilities-carers/>

The Access & Support Program provides short term support to help people access aged care and other services so they can continue living at home independently. The Program provides information, referral, support and monitoring. The aged and disability team generally aims to increase access to aged care and disability services for CALD communities in the EMR through working with CALD communities to promote those services, provide information and referral and supporting organisations to provide culturally appropriate care.

#### Senior Citizens Groups

For more information please contact local councils or the Migrant Information Centre (Eastern Melbourne) on (03)9275 6905.

Name of the Club	LGA	Venue
Burgher Association of Australia Inc.	<b>Monash</b>	Burgher Association Hall 358 Haughton Rd Clayton, 3168
Sri Lankan Elders' Welfare Association	<b>Dandenong – but have membership from EMR</b>	78 Power Road Doveton 3177
Tamil Senior Citizens Fellowship Vic. Inc.	<b>Monash</b>	Oakleigh Hall 142 Drummond St Oakleigh, 3166

### Other Support Services

#### **Australia Sri Lanka Welfare Guild**

Address: 8 Heatherdew Close, Mount Waverley, 3149

Email: [aswg.vic@gmail.com](mailto:aswg.vic@gmail.com)

Promotes fellowship and encourages members to work together to improve the community.

### **Buddhist Sri Lankan Association of Victoria**

Address: 7 Banksia Street, Clayton, 3168

Ph: (03) 9769 0872

Email: [info@dhammasarana.org.au](mailto:info@dhammasarana.org.au)

### **Sinhalese Cultural & Community Services Foundation**

Provide fortnightly social support day program on Sundays from 9.30am until 3pm.

Meeting Address: Moorleigh Community Centre, 92 Bignell Rd, East Bentleigh, 3165

### **Tamil Australian Friendship Society**

Address: P.O. Box 5811, Studfield 3152

### **Tamil Society of Melbourne**

Address: PO Box 3175, Wheelers Hill, 3150

Ph: 9560 7754

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