

## South Sudanese Cultural Profile

**PLEASE NOTE:** This profile provides an overview of some of the cultural information relating to the diverse groups of South Sudanese 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 Republic of South Sudan is the world's youngest nation, officially established on 9<sup>th</sup> of July 2011. The Southern Sudanese have fought for this independence for decades in an ongoing civil war between the north and south since 1956. There was a brief peace period between 1972 and 1983 by negotiations between Southern Sudanese insurgents, the Anya Nya, and the Sudanese government at Addis Abbaba.

Southern Sudan has been damaged significantly by this ongoing civil war which has been fought for all but 11 of the past 50 years (Collopy, Langley, DeBlasio & Chippett 2007; Victorian Multicultural Commission 2008). In January 2005 both sides signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which ended the fighting and granted the southern part of the country autonomy for six years (DIAC 2007). Under the terms of the CPA, a referendum on the south's political future was held in 2011 where nearly 99 percent of the region's voters approved a split from northern Sudan (now known as Sudan), which saw the south decide to separate from the north and form a new country – the Republic of South Sudan (Addario 2011).

The Republic of South Sudan is located in the northeast region of the continent, bordering six other African nations: Sudan, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda (Collopy et al. 2007). South Sudan has an estimated population of 8,260,490 people and is ethnically and culturally diverse with approximately 600 varying ethnic groups existing throughout the country. In addition, there are over 400 different languages spoken (CIA 2011; Collopy et al. 2007).

### Migration:

- Drought, famine, war damage and limited infrastructure in the south have hindered the return of the estimated 500,000 Sudanese refugees who fled to neighbouring countries such as Congo, Kenya, Uganda, Egypt and Ethiopia in an attempt to find safety and security (DIAC 2007; Victorian Multicultural Commission 2008).
- Due to the Republic of South Sudan recently becoming a new country, no statistics have yet been reported which isolate the south from the north.
- Australia has assisted in resettling some of the worst affected people from Sudan and in the 2002-03 financial year, Sudan became the Humanitarian Migration Programme's top source country and has since provided more than 33% of programme arrivals (DIAC 2007).
- Over the last 20 years, Australia continues to see an increase in the number of Sudanese arriving as refugees under the Humanitarian Migration Program (Victorian Multicultural Commission 2008). This was evident at the 2016 Census, where it was recorded that there were 1,632 Sudanese-born persons in Victoria (35.7% of Australia's total Sudanese population), increasing by 146.0% from 1,118 persons in 2011 (ABS 2016).

## Local Demographics: Sudanese-born\* residents in the Eastern Region

| Local Government Area | Total Sudanese-born Population | 50-59 years | 60-69 years | 70-79 years | 80 years and over |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------|
| City of Boroondara    | 24                             | 8           | 0           | 0           | 0                 |
| City of Knox          | 68                             | 11          | 6           | 0           | 0                 |
| City of Manningham    | 64                             | 14          | 13          | 11          | 0                 |
| City of Maroondah     | 57                             | 3           | 0           | 0           | 0                 |
| City of Monash        | 95                             | 8           | 3           | 0           | 0                 |
| City of Whitehorse    | 59                             | 7           | 5           | 3           | 0                 |
| Shire of Yarra Ranges | 34                             | 3           | 0           | 0           | 0                 |
| Eastern Region        | 401                            | 54          | 27          | 14          | 0                 |

\* Note: the above census data does not distinguish between northern Sudan and southern Sudan born individuals (ABS 2016)

- In the 2016 Census in Victoria, 2,750 individuals originating from South-Sudan were recorded, making up 35.7% of Australia's total Sudanese population (ABS 2016).
- The median age of the South Sudanese-born population was 33 years compared to 37 years for the total Victorian population (ABS 2016).

### Language:

- Individuals from Sudan originate from diverse ethnicities, speaking many different languages. According to the 2016 Census data, 49.1% of individuals spoke Dinka at home, 21% spoke Arabic and 14.1% spoke Nuer, making these languages the top three languages spoken in Victorian households of Sudanese-born residents (ABS 2016).
- As indicated by the 2016 Census, 14.3% of the Sudanese-born population in Victoria identified as speaking English 'not well' or 'not at all', while 45.6% of the Sudanese-born population identified themselves as being able to speak English 'very well' and 33.5% 'well' (ABS 2016).

### Dinka-speaking residents in the Eastern Region

| Local Government Area | Total number of people speaking Dinka at home | 50-59 years | 60-69 years | 70-79 years | 80 years and over | Total number of Dinka speaking people aged 65 and over | Dinka speaking people aged 65+ as a % of the Dinka speaking population |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| City of Boroondara    | 0                                             | 0           | 0           | 0           | 0                 | 0                                                      | 0%                                                                     |
| City of Knox          | 20                                            | 0           | 0           | 0           | 0                 | 0                                                      | 0%                                                                     |
| City of Manningham    | 0                                             | 0           | 0           | 0           | 0                 | 0                                                      | 0%                                                                     |
| City of Maroondah     | 13                                            | 0           | 0           | 0           | 0                 | 0                                                      | 0%                                                                     |
| City of Monash        | 34                                            | 4           | 0           | 0           | 0                 | 0                                                      | 0%                                                                     |
| City of Whitehorse    | 22                                            | 0           | 0           | 0           | 0                 | 0                                                      | 0%                                                                     |
| Shire of Yarra Ranges | 22                                            | 0           | 0           | 0           | 0                 | 0                                                      | 0%                                                                     |
| Eastern Region        | 111                                           | 4           | 0           | 0           | 0                 | 0                                                      | 0%                                                                     |

(ABS Census 2016)

## Religion:

The Sudanese-born population identify with a number of religions, with Southern Sudan being both culturally and religiously different from northern Sudan. A contrast between Arab and Muslim influences predominate in the north and animist and Christian beliefs in the south have been identified (DIAC 2007). The following top 5 religious affiliations held by the Sudanese-born population in Victoria were identified at the 2016 Census (ABS 2016):

- Catholic – 41.7% (1,147 persons)
- Anglican – 23.2% (638 persons)
- Presbyterian/Reform – 10.9% (301 persons)
- Christian – 6.4% (176 persons)
- Uniting Church – 4.3% (118 persons)

## Attitudes and Issues with Ageing

- The Sudanese-born population in Australia is relatively young, with the majority of people in the community aged between 26 and 44 years. 12 and 18 years. Only 0.9% of Sudanese born individuals were above the age of 65 years (ABS 2016).
- Some studies have reported that for older people from Sudanese backgrounds who have come to Australia, displacement and settlement experiences have negatively affected their roles as elders in their families and respective communities (Refugee Health Research Centre 2004).
- In Sudan, elders maintain a high position in family life, being called upon to resolve family and community disputes, provide advice to children, administer traditional laws and act as cultural guardians (Collopy et al. 2007; Refugee Health Research Centre 2004).
- In some communities, from a spiritual point of view, elders are also considered to have the power to curse or bless people and as a result are highly respected (Onyala 2011).
- In Australia, older people from Sudanese backgrounds often feel disempowered and isolated as state and federal laws manage family matters (Refugee Health Research Centre 2004).
- In Sudan, aged care welfare is all undertaken at home as aged care facilities are not available and it is the moral responsibility of the family to care for the elderly.

## Attitudes to Disability and Mental Illness:

- It has been reported that some people from South Sudanese backgrounds regard mental illness as a sign of weakness and therefore it is not an issue that is openly discussed (McLean 2005).
- Mental illness and disability can also be regarded as the result of an elder's curse upon the person (Onyala 2011).
- Traditionally, a strong social stigma is attached to mental illness and therefore, individuals with mental illness often sought help from native healers in the village (McLean 2005).
- There is a shortage of mental health service provision in South Sudan and therefore individuals may be unfamiliar with this type of service (McLean 2005).
- Southern Sudanese families care and support their family members with disabilities, while moral support is also offered by the community (Dei Wal 2004).

## Attitudes to Death and Palliative Care

- Sudanese-born people are usually very demonstrative in their grief, often throwing themselves on the ground. As a result of this, bad news is often not given without the presence and support of the community (Sneesby, Satchell, Good & Van der Riet 2010).
- Customarily in South Sudanese culture, a celebratory feast is held when a person over the age of 60 years dies (Sneesby, et al. 2010).
- However, in the circumstance that a younger person dies, South Sudanese-born people look at it as a time of great sadness. Often the bereaved mourners scream or cry and there is an increased risk of self-harm in those close to the deceased (Sneesby, et al. 2010).
- Black clothes are traditionally worn when mourning in Sudanese culture, except by some tribes in Sudan where the widow wears white (Sneesby, et al. 2010).
- It has been reported that while parents or siblings of the deceased are expected to grieve for 40 days, widows are expected to mourn the death of a husband for 12 months, after which, a community member will remove the mourning clothing (Sneesby, et al. 2010).

## Customs / Values:

- South Sudanese-born people often have a respect for culture and their elders (Onyala 2011).
- South Sudanese families are often very private and reluctant to discuss family conflict or issues with non-family members.
- Visitors in a South Sudanese home are often provided water initially, followed by food and tea or coffee. Receiving and sharing such hospitality is a sign of courtesy and respect (Collopy et al. 2007).

## Communication Styles:

- Eye contact is important within South Sudanese culture. As a sign of respect to their elders, young people cannot give direct eye contact; instead they must cast their eyes downward (McLean 2005).
- Individuals of the same sex and age group may give direct eye contact to one another; however individuals of the opposite sex cannot give direct eye contact (Onyala 2011).
- Communication styles between northern Sudan and Southern Sudan can be quite different (Collopy et al. 2007).
- Individuals from Southern Sudan greet friends, relatives and even foreigners with a handshake (Collopy et al. 2007).
- In Southern Sudan, men and women can shake hands and women can also be addressed directly (Collopy et al. 2007).

## Naming Conventions:

- People are often called by their first name, except for elders, teachers and religious leaders who are addressed by their title and surname.
- Married women usually maintain their maiden name and do not take on their husband's surname (Onyala 2011).

## Health Beliefs and Practices:

- Sudanese-born individuals residing in Australia sometimes feel that doctors do not prescribe medicine according to the pain or illness they are experiencing (Onyala 2011).
- Some Sudanese-born individuals may be unfamiliar with being treated by a doctor of the opposite gender and therefore it is important to ask them if they are comfortable with this (DIAC 2007).
- On rare occasions, Sudanese adults and elders utilise traditional herbal remedies (Onyala 2011).

## Dinka Greetings

| English Greeting | Dinka         | Closest English Pronunciation |
|------------------|---------------|-------------------------------|
| Hello            | Kudual        | KUDUAL                        |
| Good Morning     | Ci yi ruen    | CI YI RUEN                    |
| Goodbye          | Yin abi caath | YIN ABI CAATH                 |
| Yes              | Ce tede       | CE TEDE                       |
| No               | Aliu          | ALIU                          |
| Thank you        | Yin aca leec  | YIN ACA LEEC                  |

## Arabic Greetings:

| English Greeting | Arabic      | Closest English Pronunciation |
|------------------|-------------|-------------------------------|
| Hello            | سلام        | SALAM                         |
| Good Morning     | صباح الخير  | SABAH EL KHEER                |
| Good Evening     | مساء الخير  | MASAA EL KHEER                |
| Goodbye          | مع السلامة  | MA'A SALAMA                   |
| Yes              | لا          | NA'AM                         |
| No               | نعم         | LAA                           |
| Thank you        | شكرا (جزيل) | SHOKRAN                       |

## Nuer Greetings

| English Greeting | Nuer            | Closest English Pronunciation |
|------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|
| Hello            | Maale           | MAALÉ                         |
| Morning Greeting | Ce nien ke mal? | CE NIEN KE MAL?               |

## Key Sudanese Festivals / Significant Dates:

- Independence Day *1<sup>st</sup> January 1956*  
*(Sudanese nation achieves independence from Great Britain – this day is usually celebrated with speeches by leaders and politicians followed by traditional dances in the evening performed by each tribe)*
- Addis Abbaba Agreement *3<sup>rd</sup> March 1972*  
*(Celebrates the end of 1955-1972 civil war, peace accord between north and south)*
- Naivasha Agreement *9<sup>th</sup> January 2005*  
*(Celebrates the end of the 1983-2004 civil war, peace accord between south and north)*
- Independence Day *9<sup>th</sup> July 2011*  
*(Celebrates the Republic of South Sudan's independence from the northern region)*

## Local Services Useful for Sudanese-born residents in the Eastern Region:

### Settlement Services

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

| Name                                           | Address                                                                                        | Contact                                       |
|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Migrant Information Centre (Eastern Melbourne) | Suite 2, Town Hall Hub, 27 Bank Street, Box Hill 3128 <u>and</u> 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 and 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.

## Other Support Services

### **Multicultural Sudanese Centre Inc.**

Address: 12 Holland Court, Flemington, VIC, 3031

Ph: (03) 9943 3042

Provides welfare and support for Sudanese migrants in Victoria. Also provides other services such as education support programs, employment services and community services aiding in accessing legal aid, tram and train ticket machines etc.

### **Sudanese Community Association of Australia (SSCAV)**

Address: 30A Pickett St, Footscray VIC 3011

Website: <http://sscav.com.au/>

SSCAV missions is to unite our community and work together for each other's development and progress. SSCAV also stands to help service providers, government and local government departments understand the issues the community faces, the cultural differences and ease their work dealing with South Sudanese Australians.

### **Sudanese Australian Integrated Learning Program Inc. (SAIL)**

The Sudanese Australian Integrated Learning (SAIL) Program is a completely volunteer-run, non-profit, secular organisation which provides free tutoring and educational support to the Sudanese Australian community. For locations, please visit the website:

<http://www.sailprogram.org.au/site/contact/contact/>

### **Southern Migrant and Refugee Centre**

Main Office Address: 39 Clow St, Dandenong VIC 3175

Ph: (03) 9767 1900

Email: [smrc@smrc.org.au](mailto:smrc@smrc.org.au)

Provides training in aged care, settlement services, employment services and community education services to all migrants and refugees living in the south eastern region of Melbourne.

## **Media**

There are a number of specific Sudanese media programs in Melbourne:

| Media                          | Program                                                                                          | Details                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Radio                          | 1224 AM<br>Fri 11:00 - 12:00 pm<br>African                                                       | SBS Radio Melbourne<br><a href="http://www.sbs.com.au/schedule/radio">http://www.sbs.com.au/schedule/radio</a>                                                                                                                                                        |
|                                | 3ZZZ 92.3 FM<br>Fri 12pm – 1pm<br>Fri 1pm – 2pm<br><br>Sudanese<br>Arabic Youth                  | Ethnic Public Broadcasting Association<br>of Victoria Limited<br>1/144 George St, Fitzroy, VIC 3065<br>Phone: 03-9415-1928<br>Website: <a href="http://www.3zzz.com.au">http://www.3zzz.com.au</a><br>Email: <a href="mailto:admin@3zzz.com.au">admin@3zzz.com.au</a> |
| Newspaper/Journal/<br>Articles | <i>AfricanOZ</i> -<br>African Australian news and<br>information.<br><br>Sudan online newspapers | Also available is <i>AfricanOZ Magazine</i><br>(free monthly subscription)<br><br><a href="http://www.onlinenewspapers.com/sudan.htm">www.onlinenewspapers.com/sudan.htm</a>                                                                                          |

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