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Latvia Born Community of Australia

Summary

Although there was some Latvian migration to Australia in the aftermath of the abortive 1905 revolution against Tsarist Russia, the most significant wave of Latvian emigrants arrived after the second world war. During the war Latvia was under Soviet occupation and the Latvian people were subjected to oppression and mass deportations. By 1945, 156,000 Latvians had escaped to western Europe. They were among the 12 million war refugees awaiting resettlement in Displaced Persons camps. Approximately 20,000 Latvians arrived in Australia between November 27, 1947, and the end of 1952.

Details

The latest Census in 2001 recorded 6,620 Latvia-born persons in Australia, a decrease of 18 per cent from the 1996 Census. The 2001 distribution by State and Territory showed
Victoria had the largest number with 2,120 followed by New South Wales (1,940), South Australia (1,040) and Queensland (710).

The median age of the Latvia-born in 2001 was 72.8 years compared with 46.0 years for all overseas-born and 35.6 years for the total Australian population. The age distribution showed 0.8 per cent were aged 0-14 years, 1.8 per cent were 15-24 years, 2.3 per cent were 25-44 years, 26.6 per cent were 45-64 years and 68.6 per cent were 65 and over. Of the Latvia-born in Australia, there were 3,070 males (46.4 per cent) and 3,550 females (53.6 per cent). The sex ratio was 86.4 males per 100 females.

The age and gender distribution of the population, along with the significant decrease of numbers over time is of concern to members of the Latvia born community in Australia. Without a critical mass of new arrivals, community heritage organisations very often struggle to survive. Those who still need them and rely upon them find it difficult to keep up services as the population ages.

Published resources

Edited Book
The Australian People: An Encyclopaedia of the Nation, Its People and Their Origins, Jupp, James, 2001

Book
Latvians in Australia, Putnins, A., 1981

Archival resources

State Library of South Australia
Latvian Community Museum Oral History Project: SUMMARY RECORD [sound recording] Interviewer: Mara Kolomitsev

Interview with Dzidra Knochs [sound recording] Interviewer: Bronwyn Mewett

State Library of Victoria
Reminiscences of a woman migrant from Latvia, 1944-1948 ca. 1970-ca. 1979. [manuscript].

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