

Australian 2026 Census: What's New and Why Participation Matters for Australian Hazaras

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The [value](#) of national population data, such as Australia's five-year Census, is well established. The Census informs the planning of existing and new government services, determines electoral boundaries, and provides insights into continuity and change in the nation's socio-economic and demographic status. According to [the Australian Bureau of Statistics \(ABS\)](#), the Census shows how Australia changes over time and the information it collects is used to inform decisions about transport, schools, health care, infrastructure, law and order, business and more. It also helps plan local services for individuals, families and communities.

There is ongoing [debate](#) about whether Australia still needs a five-year Census. It is partly because of availability of administrative datasets and regular surveys- including the [Australian Labour Force Survey](#), education records, Medicare and health information, taxation data, the [Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia \(HILDA\) Survey](#), and longitudinal studies such as the [Building a New Life in Australia \(BNLA\)](#)- and the significant financial cost of conducting each Census. For example, countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom conduct a census every ten years, while New Zealand has recently decided to discontinue its traditional population census in favour of administrative data.

Nonetheless, the ABS has scheduled the **2026 Census for the evening of Tuesday, 11 August 2026**. Participation in this Census is [compulsory](#) in Australia, which provides a key opportunity for Australian Hazaras to improve their visibility and representation through accurate population data. This brief paper aims to highlight some of the expected changes in the 2026 Census and advocates for the Census awareness that reflects the diversity of Australian Hazaras to better inform policy, services and future research.

Continuity and Change in the 2026 Census

The ABS undertook extensive community consultation before finalising the questionnaire for the upcoming 2026 Census. It received around 470 submissions to help ensure the Census captures both continuity and change in Australian society over the past five years.

Apart from the specific change in the numbers, the 2026 Census is expected to show the same national story in most population categories of Australia. For example, [according to the 2021 Census](#), Australia's population was around 25.5 million of which 80 percent lived in Eastern Australia (i.e., NSW, VIC, QLD and ACT) and just over half of Australia's population were born or had a parent who was born overseas. About one-fifth of around 12 million employed Australians worked from home on the 2021 Census day. From a religious diversity perspective in 2021, Christianity was the most common religion (43.9 percent); Islam was the fastest growing religion; and around 38 percent of the total population reported no religious affiliation.

Similarly, the upcoming 2026 Census will likely show that Australia's total population has grown to [28 million this year](#) mostly because of relatively high numbers of annual migration and high rate of births amongst new arrival refugee and migrant communities. Whilst most continue to live in the eastern states, it is likely that Victoria has overtaken New South Wales as Australia's state with the highest total population in the past five years.

Like the earlier censuses, the 2026 Census form asks questions about a person's age, country of birth, cultural background, living situation, work and education. Consistent with its [2016 decision](#), the ABS will continue to retain respondents' names and addresses for up to four years to facilitate the secure linkage of de-identified Census data with other administrative datasets. **However, to protect privacy, names and addresses will be stored separately and will not be used directly to link individuals with other population data.**

The 2026 Census will also introduce [several new topics](#) in the questionnaire form that reflect Australia's growing socio-cultural diversity and aim to make the national story more inclusive. These include:

- A new question on sexual orientation and gender for residents aged 16 years and over;
- Updated income questions to align with the Australian Labour Force Survey;
- The use of e-bikes as a travel option to reflect changing commuting patterns;
- The use of gender-neutral language in questions about family and personal relationships; and
- Updates to questions on parents' country of birth, the introduction of a drop-down list for religious affiliation, and an increase in the number of ancestries that respondents can report from two to four, better reflecting Australia's increasingly diverse family backgrounds and cultural identities.

What to Expect for Australian Hazaras in the 2026 Census

The 2026 Census is likely to reveal both continuity and change for Australian Hazaras. For example, in [the 2021 Census](#), around 42,000 identified as 'Hazaraghi speakers' (will be written as Hazaragi in the upcoming Census after a recent community-led campaign to change the spelling of Hazaraghi); 30,000 as Dari speakers; and 72,500 as 'Persian speakers (excluding Dari)' in Australia. The median age of Hazaragi speakers was about 10 years younger than the median age of total Australian population. From a religious perspective, more than 95 percent of Hazaragi speakers identified Islam as their religion; 3 percent stated no religion; and less than one percent as having 'secular beliefs'.

The top 10 job categories amongst Australian Hazaras in the last Census were in the construction, automobile and truck driving, agriculture, and retail industry. The education data did not provide an accurate profile, but home ownership showed that around 46 percent of Hazaragi speakers owned their home with a mortgage; another 45 percent rented; and around 5 percent owned their home outright. Australia-wide, around one-third of the population respectively rented or owned their home outright on the 2021 Census day.

Similarly, the 2026 Census is likely to show that Hazaras in Australia have been one of the fastest growing social groups in the past five years. This is because of its relatively young age profile, higher birth rates compared with the broader Australian population, and recent arrivals through humanitarian and family migration programs, particularly following the fall of Kabul to the Taliban in August 2021. According to the Department of Home Affairs, [26,500 people from Afghanistan were granted humanitarian visas between 2021 and 2025](#), although the Department has not specified how many of this cohort belong to each social group of Afghanistan who live in Australia.

It is likely that we learn from the 2026 Census that an increased number of Hazara households have moved into newer outer suburbs particularly in NSW and Victoria because of the cost-of-living pressures and cultural preferences for larger homes. More research and analysis would be required to understand how home ownership, increased entrepreneurial jobs, and living in the outer suburbs of the capital cities might have impacted children's education; their job interests and preferences; and social cohesion with Australia's other socio-cultural groups residing in these newer suburbs.

The Race, Ancestry and Language Questions

Since 1971, Australian censuses have had specific questions about whether a person identifies as a member of one of Australia's indigenous communities (i.e., Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander). This followed the [historic 1967 Referendum](#) in which more than 90 percent of Australians voted to repeal section 127 of the 1901 Constitution to allow Australian government to count indigenous populations in the Census. Given the historical injustice to and exclusion of indigenous communities in this country, successive Australian governments have planned and implemented specific budgets and initiatives to support Australia's diverse indigenous populations. Since 2008, successive Australian governments have had a formal agreement-[Closing the Gap](#)- with Australian indigenous populations to allocate a specific budget every year to close life expectancy, education, and health gaps between the indigenous and non-indigenous Australians.

Apart from specific questions about the indigenous communities, Australia has historically [avoided](#) specific questions about one's racial and ethnic identity in its censuses. It has mostly used the Australian Standard Classification of Cultural and Ethnic Groups to classify all answers on one's ancestry. In the 2021 Census, the ancestry categories had nine broad groups like Southeast Asian; 28 narrow groups like Maritime Southeast Asian; and 278 cultural and ethnic groups like Malay. Alongside a person's birthplace, religion, parents' birthplace, and language spoken at home, the complex ancestry answers have helped successive Australian governments to form a rather general view of one's ethnic or racial identity. In 2022, the former Minister for Immigration, Citizenship, Migrant Services and Multicultural Affairs Andrew Giles [reportedly showed an interest](#) to add a question on one's 'race' and 'ethnicity' in the 2026 Census but it has been excluded from the final questions in the upcoming Census.

In the past, the ABS has given each resident the opportunity to select or describe their own identity-including ancestry, religion, gender and family relationships. Apart

from the specific support for the indigenous populations and settlement services for some equity social groups, one's ancestry is rarely a priority for how different levels of Australian government plan and implement their budgets or other economic and social services. The Census question on ancestry and language spoken at home have been the dominant features of the Australian Hazaras' campaign in recent days to raise awareness about the upcoming Census. The community-led campaigns have generally adopted a unified approach by encouraging all Australian Hazaras to select Hazara as their ancestry and Hazaragi as the language spoken at home.

This approach has generated considerable debate, particularly regarding the Hazaragi language, amongst Australian Hazaras and members of this community in other countries. Supporters argue that these responses will produce more accurate data on the Hazara community and reflect the Australian government's recognition of Hazaragi as a language category distinct from Farsi and Dari. They believe that this approach enables Hazaras to define and describe their own linguistic identity in Australia.

Critics, both within Australia and overseas, generally support identifying as Hazara in the ancestry question but argue that Hazaras are predominantly Farsi speakers and that Hazaragi is a dialect of Farsi rather than a separate language. They contend that identifying Hazaragi as a separate language in the Census may, over time, weaken younger generations' connection with their broader linguistic heritage and the rich literary tradition of Farsi language.

Apart from the interpreting challenges of English language for some Australian Hazaras especially after their arrival in Australia, the diverse perspectives on the Hazaragi language debate seem to have been shaped by the historical experiences of Hazaras in Afghanistan and by the experiences of many Hazara refugees who have lived in countries such as Pakistan and Iran. In societies like Afghanistan where reliable population data is limited and minority groups have historically experienced discrimination, exclusion and, at times, physical and cultural persecution, national censuses and [ethnic-based bloc voting in elections](#) often become important opportunities for communities to demonstrate their social presence and visibility.

Australia approaches ancestry differently. The Census treats ancestry as a personal question, recognising that individuals may identify with multiple ancestral backgrounds. For example, someone may identify as both Irish and Italian because of their parents' heritage, while also recognising additional ancestral backgrounds through their grandparents. This is the main reason why the ABS will allow the 2026 Census respondents to select or write up to four ancestries on the question about the ancestry rather than two responses which were used in the previous censuses. Similarly, many Australians may have one Hazara parent and another parent from a different cultural background. The Census should therefore allow individuals to accurately reflect these multiple ancestries.

Language spoken at home is equally complex. Families with one Hazara parent may use English, Hazaragi and one or more additional languages in everyday life. Even households with two Hazara parents can have diverse linguistic experiences. Some families spent many years in Afghanistan or Iran, where both spoken and written Farsi were commonly used at home and in the wider society. Others lived in

Pakistan or in Arabic countries like Syria where they were educated respectively in Urdu/English or Arabic and, therefore, might be more comfortable to speak Urdu or Arabic at home. Increasingly, Australian-born Hazara families may speak English as their main language at home.

For these reasons, community campaigns promoting participation in the 2026 Census should recognise the diversity of language use within Australian Hazara households. The language spoken at home may also differ from a person's ancestral or mother language. Accordingly, the 2026 Census messaging should acknowledge this diversity rather than assume a single ancestral identity or language experience for all Australian Hazaras. Capturing this complexity will enable current and future governments and service providers to better understand, communicate with and support Australia's increasingly diverse Hazara communities.