

Racism and affected communities

Australia is a multicultural, multilingual nation. More than half (51.5%) of Australians were born overseas or have a parent who was. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are 3.2% of the Australian population. Over 350 languages are spoken in Australia, in addition to 167 Indigenous languages. Non-Indigenous Australians identify with more than 300 ancestries. There is strong support in Australia for multiculturalism.

Racism is nonetheless pervasive in Australia and causes real harm to people every day. It has a long history here, beginning at first contact and is entrenched in systems, structures, and institutions. Communities and individuals affected by racism consistently identify an urgent need for the Australian Government to take coordinated, national action to address racism in all its forms.

National Anti-Racism Framework

Racism and migration	
Recent human rights advances	The Australian Parliament has passed laws strengthening protections against hate speech and prohibiting hate symbols.
	Australian governments established the Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion.
	The Australian Parliament established the Joint Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs inquiry into racism, hate and violence directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

In December 2025, there was an antisemitic terrorist attack on a Jewish community event celebrating Hanukkah in Sydney in which 15 people were killed by the terrorists. Amongst other responses, the Australian Government has announced a Royal Commission which will inquire into the prevalence and nature of antisemitism and how to address it, the circumstances behind the terrorist attack, strengthening social cohesion and countering ideologically and religiously motivated extremism.¹

Following 7 October 2023 the Australian Government established special envoys to combat antisemitism, and Islamophobia, and funded supports for affected

communities. The Commission undertook consultations with Jewish, Muslim, Palestinian, Arab and Israeli communities and reported on its findings to the Australian Government. Additional legal protections against race hate and vilification have been introduced nationally and, in some states, and territories.

Racism remains a serious concern

Addressing the rise in racism and hatred	
Urgent human rights issues	Antisemitism and Islamophobia is rising, especially since the 7 October 2023 Hamas attack and war in Gaza. The Bondi Beach terrorist attack in December 2025 shocked Australia and has led governments to commit to redouble their efforts to address antisemitism.

Racial discrimination and racial vilification have increased in Australia.

In 2024, Reconciliation Australia's Barometer found that 54% of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander People reported experiencing at least one form of racial discrimination within the past six months. This is a significant increase over the last decade from 39% in 2014.

The Scanlon Foundation's 2024 Mapping Social Cohesion research survey revealed 17% of Australians say they have experienced discrimination because of their skin colour, ethnic origin or religion in the 12 months prior to the survey. These figures increased to 34% for those from non-English speaking backgrounds.

The Israel Hamas war has led to increases in Australia of antisemitism, anti-Arab racism, anti-Palestinian racism, Islamophobia and prejudice against Israeli Australians. In 2023-24 the Executive Council of Australian Jewry reported an increase of 316% in the overall number of anti-Jewish incidents nationwide compared to the previous year. The 2023-24 Islamophobia in Australia Report records a 250% increase of reported online incidents and a 150% increase in offline or in person incidents of Islamophobia in the same period as previous reports.

This data confirms the alarming prevalence of racism in Australia. There is an urgent need to respond to protect communities against this harm.

The Special Envoys on [antisemitism](#) and [Islamophobia](#) have released reports setting out the incidence of racism and proposed responses to it.

Racism and migration

Recent human rights advances

The Australian Government funded a range of initiatives to address racism, including funding the Australian Human Rights Commission to develop the [National Anti-Racism Framework](#) and the [Racism@Uni](#) survey and report. The Government funded Special Envoys on antisemitism and Islamophobia who have recommended actions to address racism.

Racism at universities

In 2025, the Commission conducted a national study into the prevalence and impact of racism in Australian universities including in relation to antisemitism, anti-Palestinian racism, Islamophobia and racism against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and staff. We delivered our report including its recommendations to the Australian Government in December 2025 and it was publicly released in February 2026.

Initial findings revealed that both interpersonal and structural racism are pervasive and deeply entrenched in Australian universities, and racism affects various communities differently, including Jewish, Muslim, Palestinian, and Middle Eastern students and staff. First Nations students and staff also reported profoundly negative impacts.

The need for a national anti-racism approach

Current approaches to anti-racism in Australia are ad-hoc, disjointed and often ineffective.

In 2024, the Australian Human Rights Commission released a [National Anti-Racism Framework](#), providing a roadmap for governments, non-government organisations, business and civil society to take action to eliminate racism and promote racial equality in Australia.

The Framework was developed through extensive research, engagement with experts and comprehensive community consultation. It includes insights from consultations with First Nations and multicultural communities.

The Commission heard consistently from First Nations and other communities experiencing racism that systemic racism is embedded throughout Australia and requires an urgent, national response.

The Framework has 63 recommendations with proposed reforms across the legal, justice, health, education, media and arts sectors as well as workplaces and data collection. There is alignment between the Framework recommendations and those proposed by the Special Envoys including around workplaces and the education and media sectors.

Priority Action

The Australian Government should implement the Commission's National Anti-Racism Framework.

ⁱ Prime Minister of Australia, 'Establishment of Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion' (Media release, 8 January 2026)