Data Mapping of Languages across Victoria

Regional Victoria

08.10.2021

Migration Council Australia

Executive Summary

Settlement in regional Victoria has become more popular amongst migrants and refugees. While Victoria is known for its diversity with more than a quarter of the population being born overseas, there are disparities across different regional areas, with a higher concentration of people born overseas living in regional areas in closer proximity to Metropolitan Melbourne.

The most common languages spoken in regional Victoria can be linked to older migratory trends with European and Slavic languages being very common. Furthermore, regional areas follow a general trend in Victoria, with a substantive portion of the population speaking Mandarin. The 2021 Settlement Data also reveals a large number of South and Southeast Asian languages being spoken in regional Victoria.

This brief focuses on languages spoken in Regional Victoria whose speakers report low English proficiency, as English proficiency is a significant factor influencing the successful settlement of migrants and refugees in Australia.

Understanding the level of English proficiency among different culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities is particularly important for government decision-makers during the COVID-19 pandemic, as migrants and refugees with low English proficiency are more likely to experience vaccine hesitancy and be susceptible to misconceptions and misinformation.[i] This forms part of a broader trend in which low English proficiency affects health literacy and access to adequate healthcare including preventative health services.

Key trends identified are as follows:

- A large number of different language communities who report to speak English "not well" or "not at all" (low English proficiency) can be found in Geelong, followed by Shepparton and North West;

- Karen, Dari and Hazaraghi have the highest percentage of speakers with low English proficiency. These languages are spoken in countries reflecting the last decade's humanitarian intake, noting speakers of these languages may not have lived in Australia for a long time. Additionally, many European and Slavic languages are among the 27 languages identified having low English proficiency mainly due to the low English proficiency of the older cohort of these language communities;

- Following the trend of Metropolitan Melbourne, many of the languages reporting low English proficiency also have speakers with lower levels of education. This impacts upon the health literacy of members of those communities, as well as the types of communications strategies that will be appropriate for government to adopt;

- Women tend to have lower English proficiency than men, except among Hazaraghi, Korean, Cantonese, Chinese (nfd) and Tongan speakers. There is a minimal difference in the number of speakers with low English proficiency between men and women aged from 10 to 69 years.

After the age of 70, discrepancies between the gender start to show, with more women reporting low English proficiency than men.

It is important to note that there are limitations in the data available. In particular, levels of English proficiency are self-reported in the Census data and Settlement Database. Individuals may either overestimate or underestimate their ability, while in many instances, English proficiency has not been recorded at all. Similarly, while all efforts are made to keep information on recent arrivals up to date, the Settlement Database may not have a person's latest residential address, nor does it track the change in English proficiency over time.

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Introduction

Migration Council Australia has been contracted by the Victorian Department of Families, Fairness and Housing to map the key languages spoken in Victoria with the purpose of informing the Victorian Government's communication and engagement strategies for CALD communities. This brief is the second part of a two-report series and will focus on regional Victoria. The first report focussed on Metropolitan Melbourne.

In 2016, 25.9% of people in Victoria spoke a language other than English at home, which was an increase from 23% in 2011. While most migrants and refugees settle in Metropolitan Melbourne, regional Victoria continues to be an attractive settlement destination for migrants and refugees with 214,296 people born overseas.

For the purposes of developing a communication and engagement strategy for CALD communities, whether a person speaks a language other than English at home is not the only (or most relevant) factor for government to consider. Some people may speak a language other than English at home but still have a high level of English proficiency, while others may speak English "not well" or "not well at all" (low English proficiency). It is the latter group who are in particular need of targeted communication and engagement from government, including translation of key information.

People with low English proficiency can experience added challenges in settling in Australian society. For example, they may encounter difficulties obtaining employment, experience social isolation and face particular challenges in accessing healthcare. Recent analysis indicates that low English proficiency is strongly correlated with vaccine hesitancy in CALD communities. Similarly, levels of English proficiency affect healthy literacy and access to adequate and appropriate healthcare, including preventative services. [ii]

This brief will:

- Provide an overview of the top languages spoken at home in regions (SA4's) of Victoria, including those whose speakers self-report as having low English proficiency;
- Identify the top languages whose speakers self-report as having low English proficiency and map the geographical spread of those speakers across regions in Victoria;
- Identify differences in English proficiency across genders;
- Identify differences in English proficiency across age brackets; and
- Identify differences in English proficiency according to level of education.

Data Considerations

The 2016 Census data and data from the 2021 Settlement Database have been used to map out languages spoken across different areas in regional Victoria. The brief has split regional Victoria into eight regions: Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong, Hume, Latrobe – Gippsland, North West, Shepparton, and Warrnambool and South West based on Statistical Area Level 4 (SA4)[1].

Statistical Area Level 4 (SA4) provides the most reasonable and significant scale upon which to form a data analysis for regional Victoria due to low population density. In particular, the western parts of the state have much smaller and scattered populations than the Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Metropolitan Melbourne. If an analysis was conducted on the basis of LGAs in regional Victoria, some population and language groups would be excluded from the data sets and thus wouldn't be considered in the analysis. Furthermore, data would be masked in the Settlement Database in order to protect respondents' privacy and prevent identification.

2016 Census data

To develop communication and engagement strategies for CALD communities with low English proficiency, the data in this brief only includes respondents who have stated they speak a non-English language as their main language at home. The exception to this is Appendix 1, which includes people who speak English at home, as this helps understand the proportion of the population who do not require in-language resources.

In situations where the language spoken at home was not listed as an option in the Census questions, respondents could add it manually. 11% of individuals did this in the 2016 Census, leading to some languages recording a low number of speakers. As a result, these languages may not be captured in some graphs in this brief. This is especially prevalent for languages of African origin.

2021 Settlement data

This data is sourced from the Settlement Database and is compiled from a number of sources, including the Department of Home Affairs, other Commonwealth agencies and service providers. The data is from January 1991 to 1 June 2021 and provides statistical data on migrants who have been granted a permanent or provisional visa through the humanitarian, family or skilled visa pathway.[2]

The main limitation in the Settlement Database is that, apart from the details first captured upon arrival to Australia (such as visa subclass, ethnicity, country of birth, gender, or age) or other information that is required to maintain a visa (such as employment status or qualifications for those on skilled visas), it is not mandatory for individuals to update much of their information with the Department of Home Affairs. While the Settlement Database strives to remain up to date with a person's current residence, English language proficiency, occupation, religion, or marital status as this

[1] Statistical Area Level 4 (SA4) is the largest sub-State regions in the Australian Statistical Geography Standards (ASGS).

[2] The Department of Home Affair's Data Dictionary includes an overview of specific visa subclasses included in the data: https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/settlement-services-subsite/files/settlement-database-data-dictionary.pdf

data is not collected in a centralised way, it does not necessarily capture changes in circumstances over time.

There are several other factors to consider when examining the Settlement Database output:

- The Settlement Database only captures arrivals to Australia from January 1991, and therefore will not include anyone who settled in Australia prior to this date;
- The Settlement Database has not been adjusted to reflect migrant and refugees who: are deceased, have permanently departed Australia, or have had their visas cancelled;
- The Settlement Database does include:
    - some duplicate settler records;
    - the number of settlers who are currently recorded as residing in a particular location;
    - many data items that are not mandatory;
    - only the settler's latest known residential (or intended residential) address.

Further, the Department of Home Affairs' privacy policy places limitations on the dataset, meaning that the 2016 Census data on gender split and age distribution of English proficiency cannot be compared against the 2021 Settlement Database.

Diaspora of CALD communities in Regional Victoria

Language spoken

The 2016 Census data shows that the main language spoken in regional Victoria (apart from English) is Italian, followed by Mandarin. The 2021 Settlement data identifies Mandarin as the most common language, followed by Arabic and South-Asian languages such as Hindi, Malayalam, Punjabi. Afghan languages such as Dari and Hazaragi are particularly common in Shepparton and North West. The discrepancies between the two data sets may be explained by the fact that many migrants speaking European and Slavic languages migrated to Australia prior to 1991 and are therefore not included in the Settlement data.

An overview of the top 30 languages spoken per region derived from 2021 Settlement data as of June 2021 and 2016 Census data is included at Appendix 1.

Country of birth

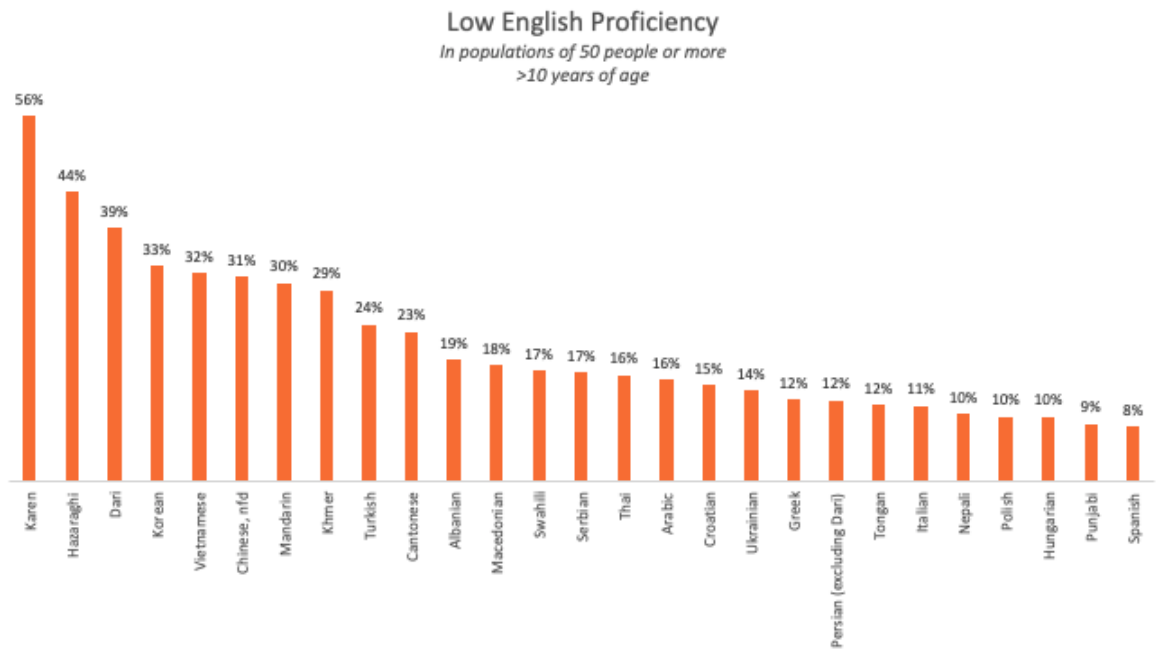
Migrants from England, New Zealand and India make up the majority of people born outside of Australia who live in regional Victoria.

An analysis of countries of birth indicates that:

- Geelong has the largest overseas born population in regional Victoria with a high percentage of people born in the Balkans, Croatia and Serbia, except for people born in Albania who mainly reside in Shepparton (94%);
- People born in South America tend to live in Geelong and Latrobe – Gippsland. For example, 80% of people born in Bolivia live in Geelong. A similar trend can be observed for people born in South-Asia, except for people born in Myanmar who mainly reside in Bendigo;
- People born in the Middle East predominantly reside in Geelong. Shepparton also houses a large number of communities from the Middle East, mainly Iraqi and Syrian, as well as a large number of people from Afghanistan;
- Regional Victoria reports a low number of populations from Central America, West Africa, Central Africa and North Africa;
- People born in East Africa tend to live in Latrobe – Gippsland and Geelong, except for Somali and Burundian communities who mainly reside in North West;
- Only 6% of all people born overseas living in regional Victoria reside in Warrnambool and South West, making this region the least culturally diverse region in regional Victoria.

English Proficiency

Graph 1 provides an overview of languages with self-reported low English proficiency in regional Victoria. The graph below depicts the percentage of people living in regional Victoria over 10 years of age who speak a language other than English at home and reported speaking English "not well" or "not at all".



Graph 1: Data from 2016 Census. Languages with low English proficiency in populations of 50 people or more where a non-English language is the dominant language spoken at home.

Languages for which more than 20% of speakers report low English proficiency are mainly East Asian, Southeast Asian and Afghan languages.

There are several important factors to note:

- There are limitations in the data. Levels of English proficiency are self-reported; while some may overestimate their ability, others may underestimate it. Further, in many instances, English proficiency is not stated or simply not recorded;

- While speakers of some languages have reported a lower percentage of low English proficiency, there may still be a significant overall cohort with low English proficiency due to the high number of speakers of those languages. For instance, 30% of Mandarin speakers (or 1,764 people) in regional Victoria have reported low English proficiency. On the other hand, a smaller percentage of the Italian speaking population reports having low English proficiency (11%) nevertheless, this still amounts to 1,138 individuals due to larger population numbers;

- The following languages were not included in the graph despite more than 10 percent of their speakers reporting low English proficiency, due to the low number of people speaking those languages (i.e. less than 50) across regional Victoria: Kirundi (27 speakers with low English proficiency), Pashto (30 speakers with low English proficiency), Burmese (14 speakers with low English proficiency), Lao (14 speakers with low English proficiency), Serbo-Croatian (25 speakers with low English proficiency), Slovene (23 speakers with low English proficiency), Bosnian (42 speakers with low English proficiency), Ewe (4 speakers with low English proficiency), Hakka (3 speakers with low English proficiency), Kurdish (7 speakers with low English proficiency), Uzbek (4 speakers with low English proficiency), and Malay (49 speakers with low English proficiency);

- Due to the large number of African languages, we can see smaller African language communities across regional Victoria. These languages often report high levels of English proficiency. For example, only 12 people in regional Victoria who spoke Dinka report to have low English Proficiency; for Nuer that number drops to 7. Due to higher English proficiency rates and a smaller number of people speaking the language, this brief may exclude some African languages.

Comparison of language groups with low English proficiency with Metropolitan Melbourne

Regional Victoria generally follows similar trends as in Metropolitan Melbourne for languages reporting low English proficiency. However, low English proficiency in some language communities such as Ukrainian, Albanian, Swahili, Tongan, Nepali and Spanish appears to be unique to regional Victoria.

Furthermore, some languages that report low levels of English proficiency across Victoria report a considerably higher percentage of the population having low English proficiency in regional Victoria. For example, 29% of the Karen speaking community reported to have low English proficiency in Metropolitan Melbourne compared to 56% in regional Victoria. Similar trends can be observed for Hazaragi and Dari.

Areas of regional Victoria with low English proficiency

Table 1 below provides an overview of the percentage of the total population of each region reporting to speak a language other than English at home who also report a low level of English proficiency.

Among those who speak a language other than English at home, Geelong has a lower percentage of individuals reporting low English proficiency than some other regions; however, it has the highest number of individuals reporting low English proficiency.

Percentage of people speaking a language other than English at home who also report low English proficiency		
Region	**Individuals**	**Percentage reporting low English proficiency**
North West	1,672	20%
Shepparton	1,631	17%
Bendigo	728	14%
Geelong	2,926	13%
Warrnambool and South West	389	13%
Hume	610	9%
Latrobe - Gippsland	1,033	9%
Ballarat	410	7%

Table 1: Percentage of people speaking a language other than English at home who also report low English proficiency. This table includes all languages, including language groups smaller than 50 speakers.

Appendix 1 lists the top 30 languages spoken per region and highlights the languages with low English proficiency.

Number of language communities with low English proficiency per region

>50 speakers of language

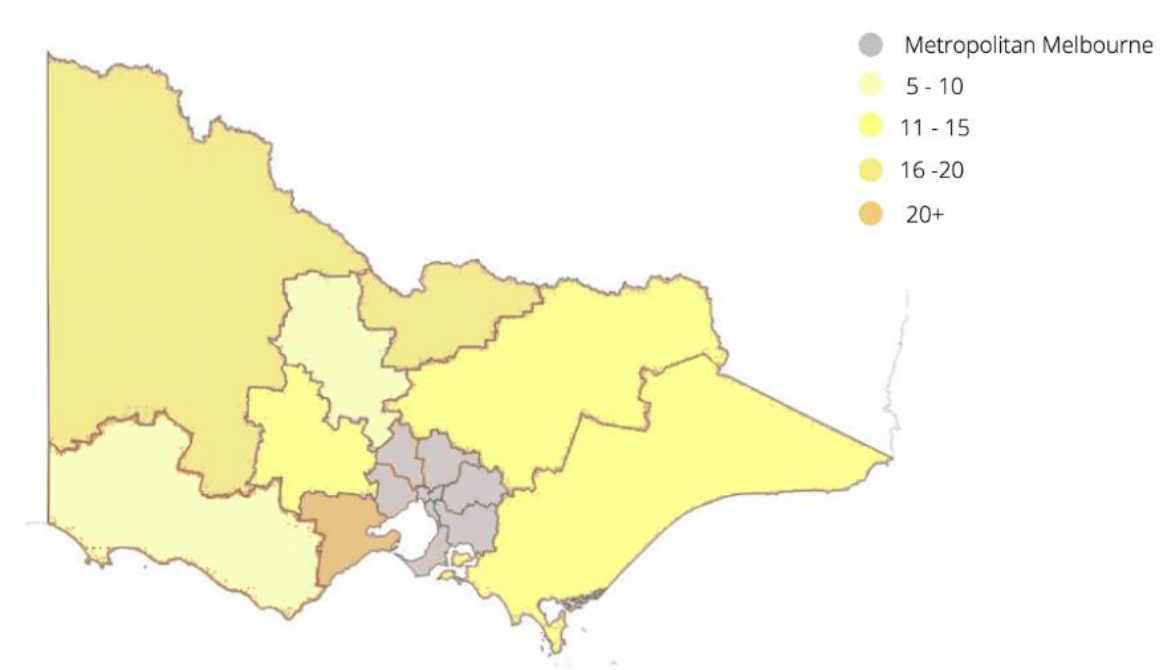


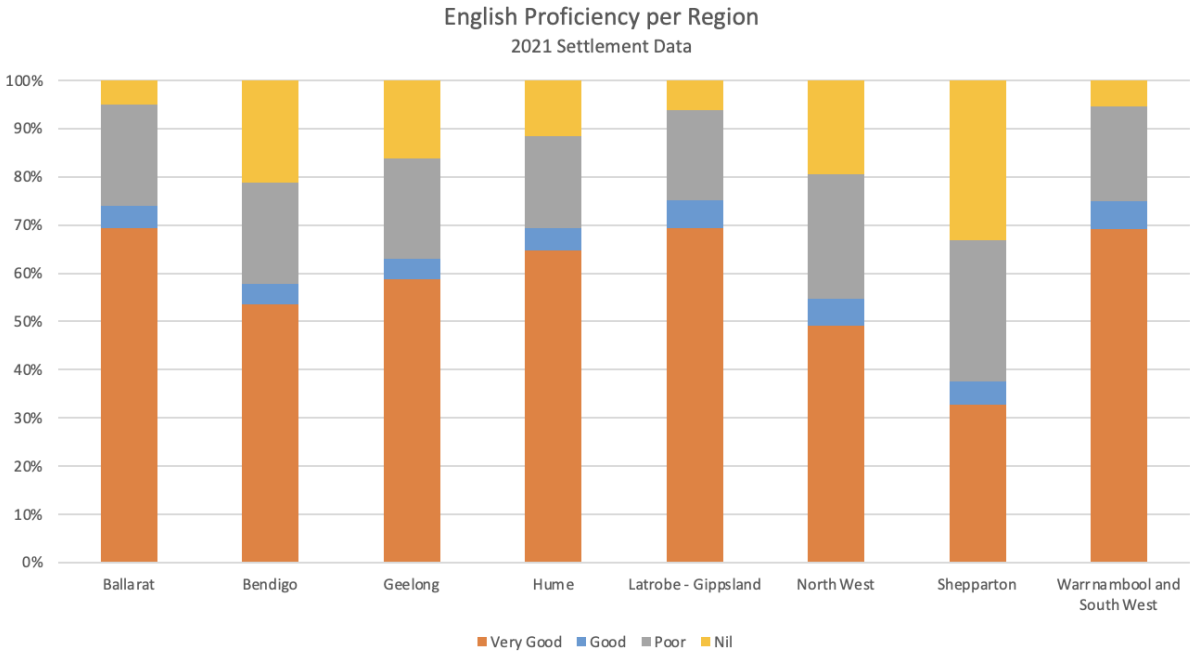
Figure 1: Number of languages present with reported low English proficiency per region with more than 50 speakers of language. 2016 Census data.

Geelong, North West and Shepparton have the highest number of language communities with low English proficiency and therefore have a need for resources in a high number of different languages.

Graph 2 and Table 2 below show the proportion of individuals in the 2021 Settlement Data who have reported their English proficiency. Shepparton records the highest percentage of individuals reporting "poor" or "nil" (62%), followed by North West, Bendigo and Geelong.

Table 2 provides a numerical overview of Graph 2. This table should be looked at in conjunction of Graph 2 to ensure an in-depth understanding of the needs across regions. For example, while an area like Geelong has a lower percentage of people reporting low English proficiency (37%) compared to Shepparton (62%), Geelong has more individuals (5,152 individuals) who have reported "poor" or "nil" English proficiency than Shepparton (3,500 individuals).

One limitation on the data below is that the levels of English proficiency are not updated throughout time, nor are the addresses. There is therefore a possibility that people who reported low levels of English proficiency when migrating to Australia, have improved their proficiency over time. Additionally, people who lived in one region when the data was collected may have moved to another region, including Metropolitan Melbourne, but are still recorded in the region they originally lived in.



Graph 2: 2021 Settlement Data, Low English proficiency based on Table 2.

Region	Very Good	Good	Poor	Nil	Not recorded	Total
Ballarat	2,710	179	819	194	3,282	**7,184**
Bendigo	2,614	204	1,025	1,035	2,823	**7,701**
Geelong	8,193	611	2,884	2,268	9,923	**23,879**
Hume	2,624	186	777	465	2,790	**6,842**
Latrobe - Gippsland	4,298	352	1,169	377	4,266	**10,462**
North West	1,982	229	1,044	782	3,363	**7,400**
Shepparton	1,837	277	1,637	1,863	3,939	**9,553**
Warrnambool and South West	1,781	148	505	138	1,751	**4,323**
Total	**26,039**	**2,186**	**9,860**	**7,122**	**32,137**	**98,781**

Table 2: 2021 Settlement data. English proficiency in each region. 'Not recorded' is not included in Graph 2.

Interestingly, the regions which contain larger proportions of the populations with low English proficiency according to the 2021 Settlement data, such as Geelong, Bendigo and Shepparton, share a similar language profile. The difference between regions, however, lies in the size of the language communities. Bendigo and Geelong both report higher numbers of speakers of South and South-East Asian languages. Geelong also houses larger Arabic and Mandarin speaking communities. While there are South and South-East Asian communities in Shepparton, the most commonly spoken languages are Afghan languages (Dari and Hazaraghi), as well as Arabic, Swahili and Albanian.

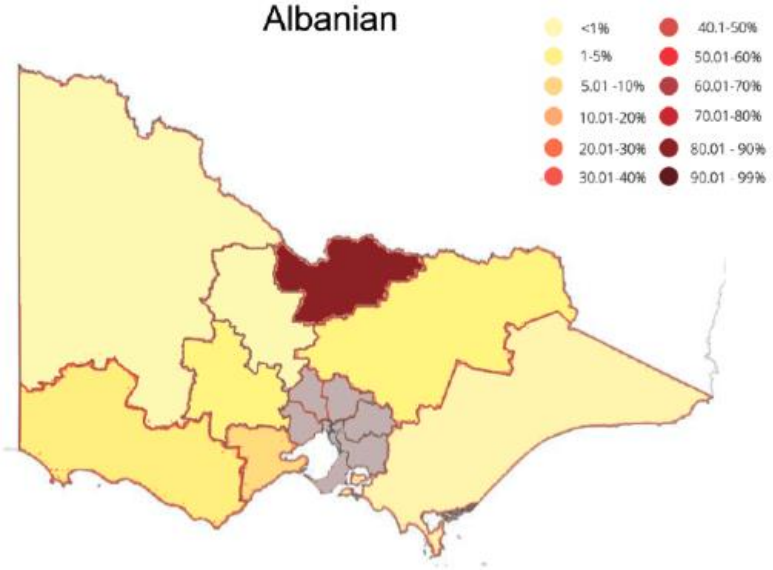
Geographical spread of languages whose speakers report low English proficiency

An analysis of languages spoken in each region indicates that:

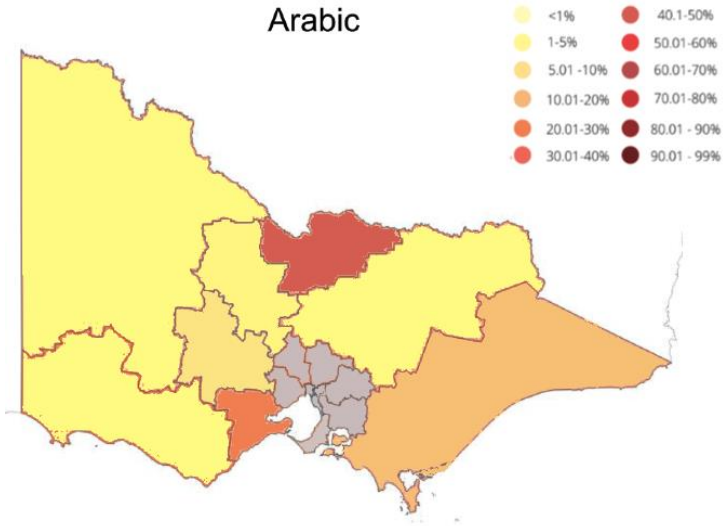
- Cantonese, Mandarin, Chinese (nfd), Korean and Italian speakers are spread across regional Victoria;
- Geelong houses a high concentration of people speaking languages originating from the Balkans. Albanian is a notable exception with speakers predominantly living in Shepparton;
- Greek and Spanish speakers are more commonly spoken in Geelong and Latrobe – Gippsland;
- Afghan and Turkish language communities live in Geelong, Shepparton and North West. Geelong and Shepparton also house a large Arabic speaking community;
- There is a notable absence of speakers of South Asian languages in Warrnambool and South West;
- Geelong and Latrobe – Gippsland house larger Southeast Asian communities. A notable exception is the Karen speaking community, of whom 52% resides in Bendigo, and the Khmer speaking community, who mainly reside in North West.

The following maps demonstrate the geographical spread of each of the 27 languages identified above in which a high number of speakers report low English proficiency.

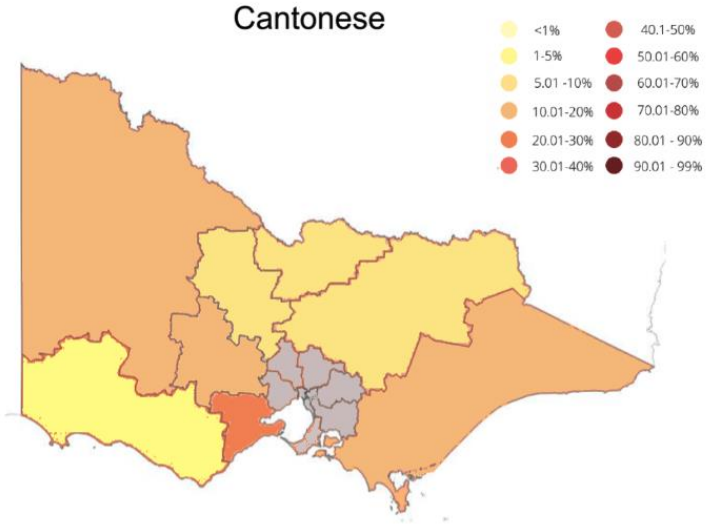
Albanian

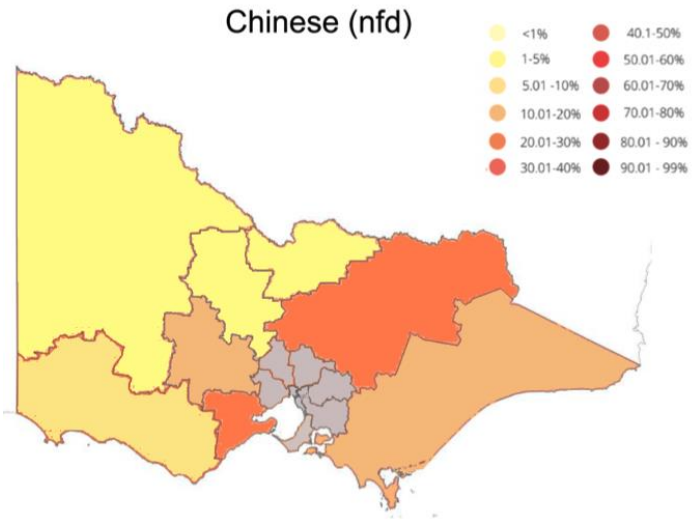


Arabic



Cantonese




Chinese (nfd)
<1%
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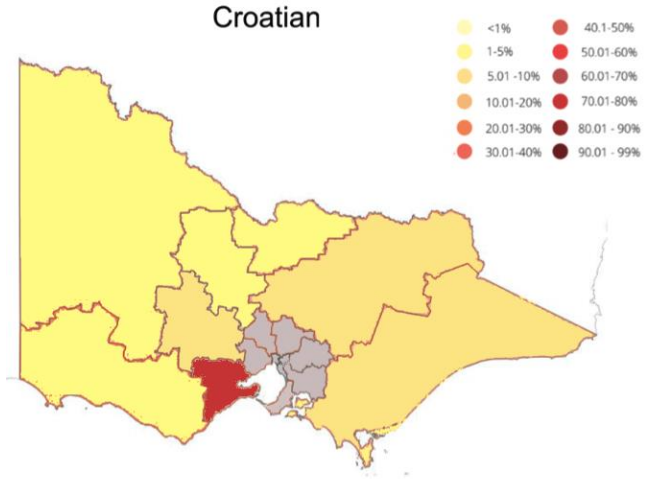
80.01 - 90%
90.01 - 99%


Croatian
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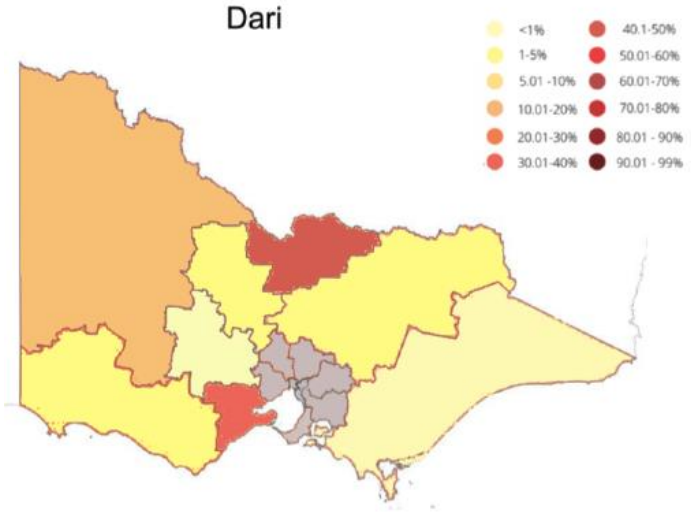
Dari
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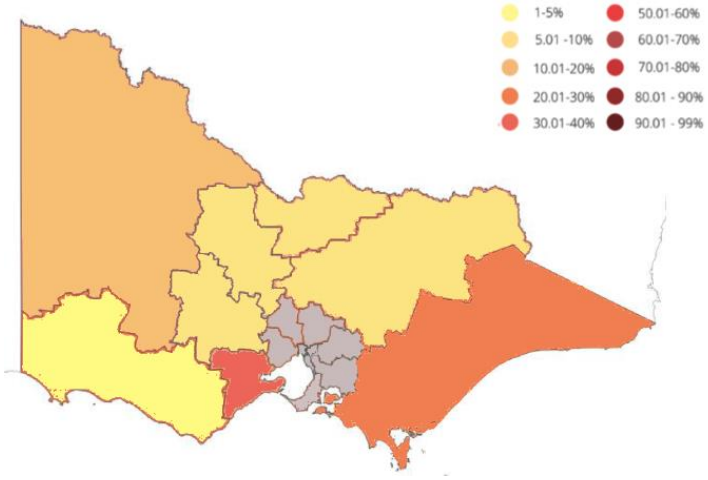
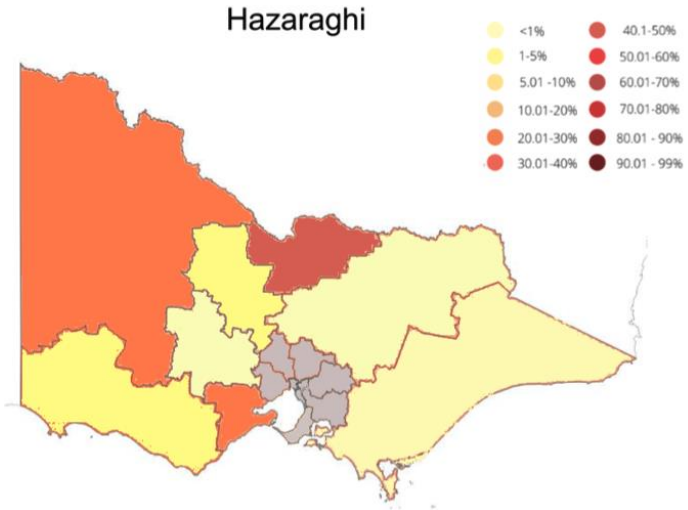
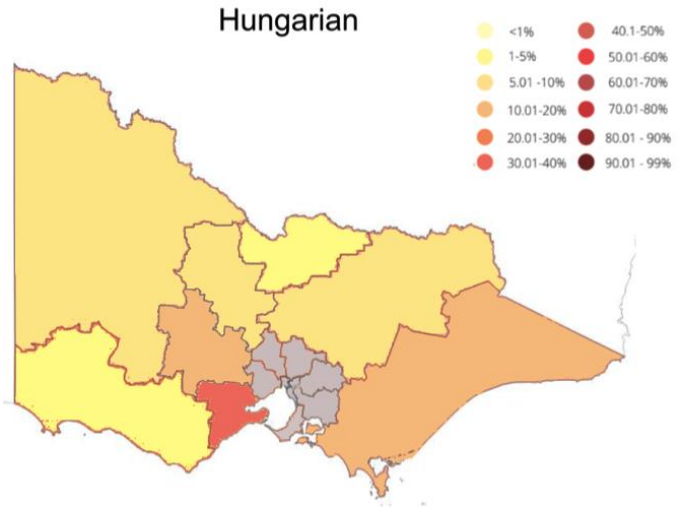
Greek

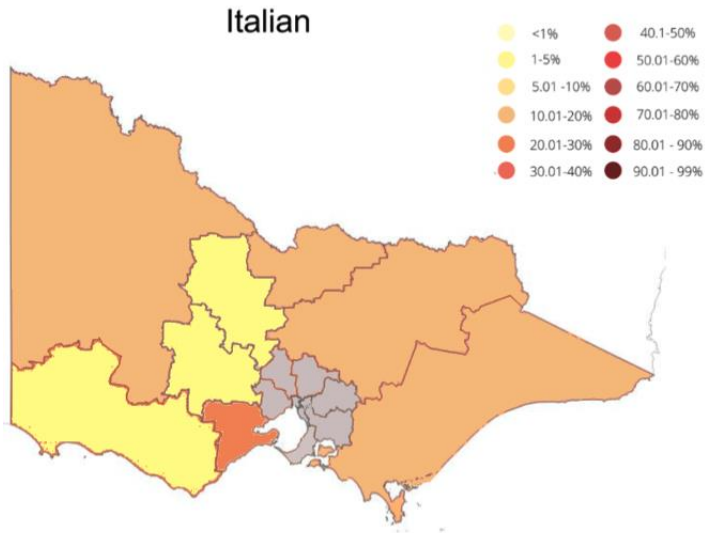


Hazaraghi



Hungarian




Italian
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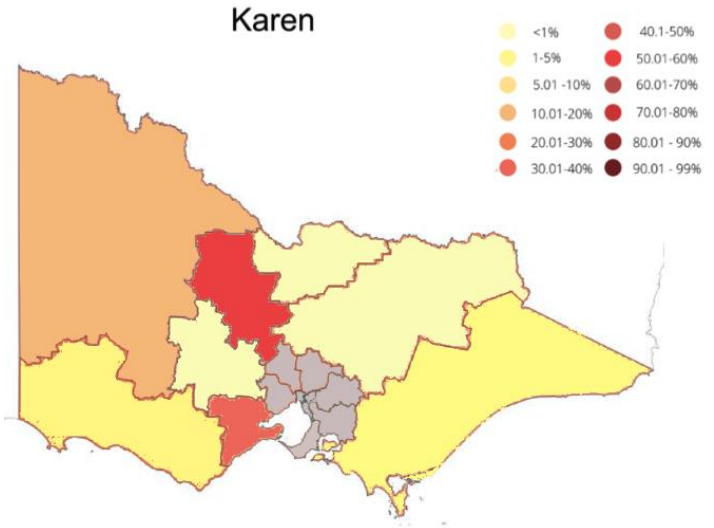
Karen
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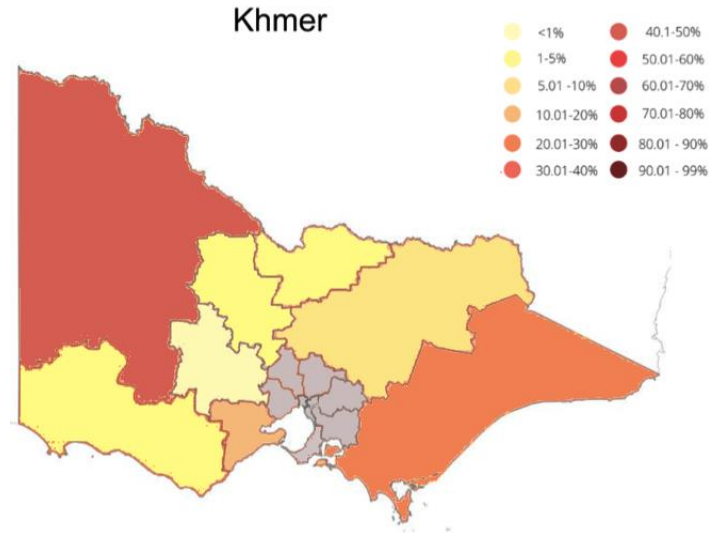
Khmer
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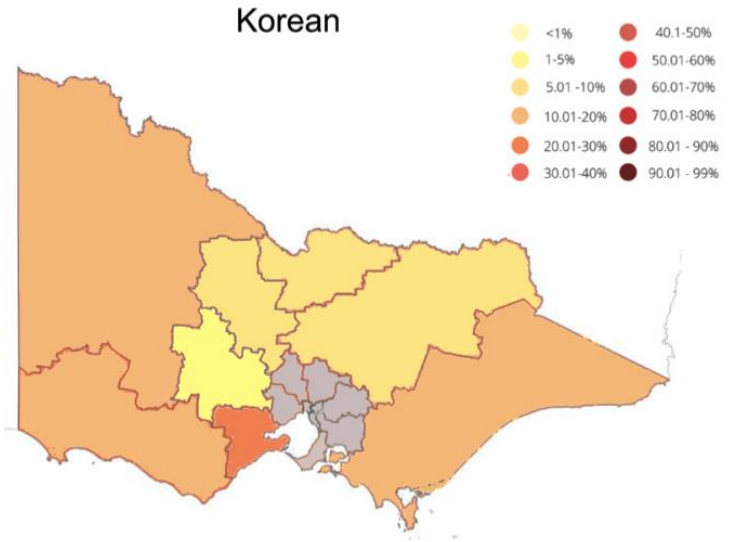
Korean
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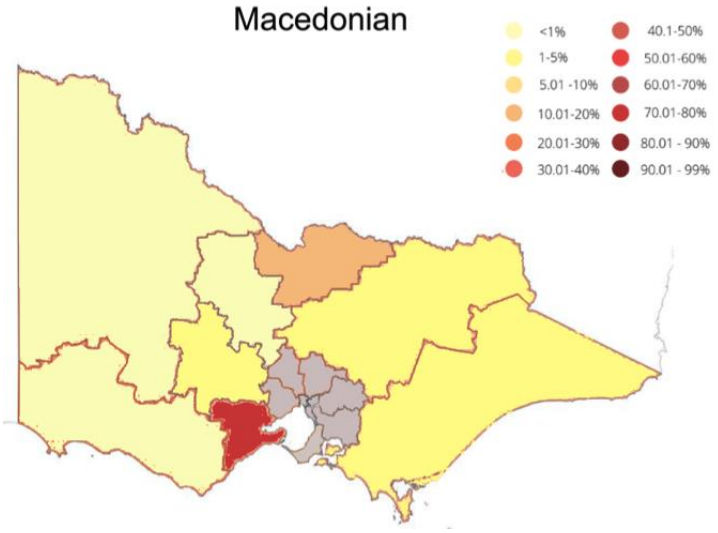
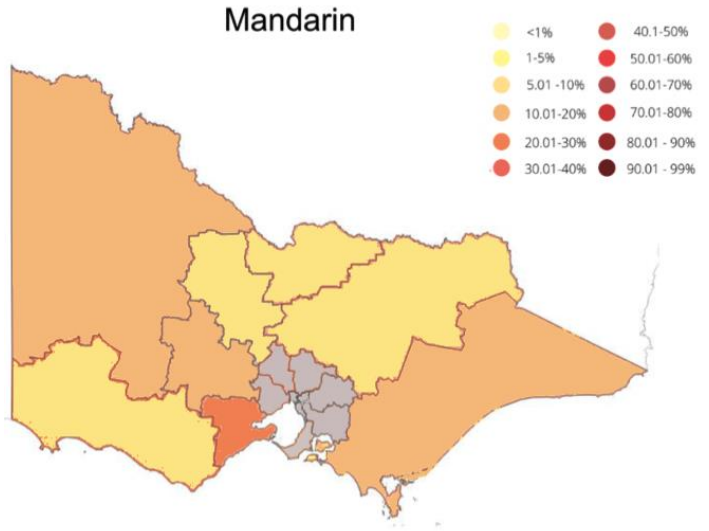
1-5%
5.01 -10%
10.01-20%
20.01-30%
30.01-40%
40.1-50%
50.01-60%
60.01-70%
70.01-80%
80.01 - 90%
90.01 - 99%


Macedonian
<1%
1-5%
5.01 -10%
10.01-20%
20.01-30%
30.01-40%
40.1-50%
50.01-60%
60.01-70%
70.01-80%
80.01 - 90%
90.01 - 99%


Mandarin
<1%
1-5%
5.01 -10%
10.01-20%
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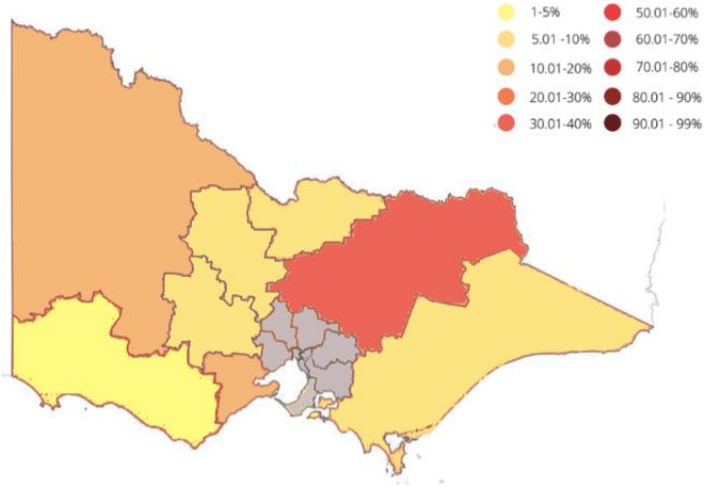
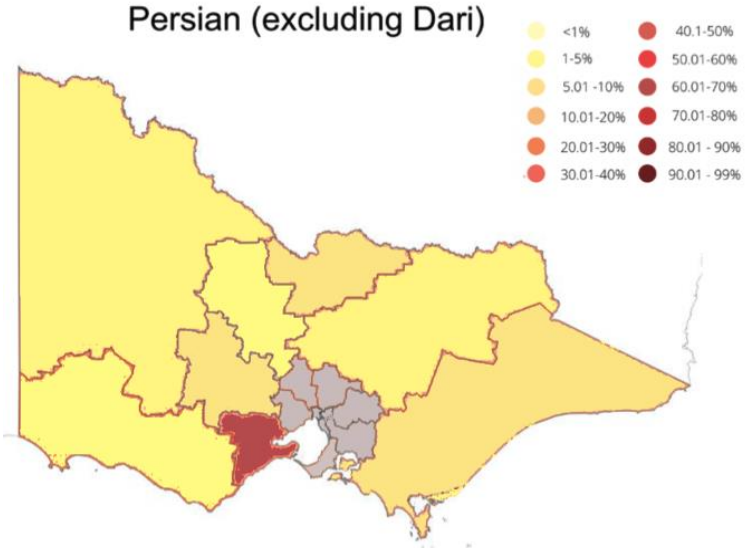
Nepali



Persian (excluding Dari)



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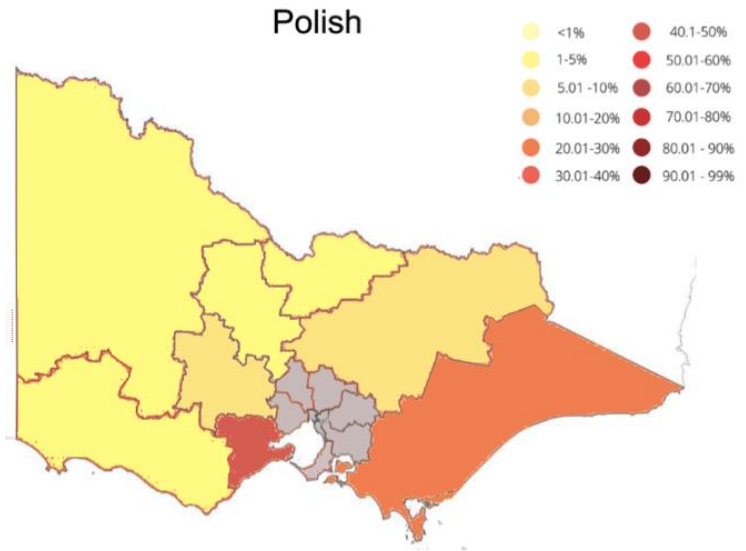

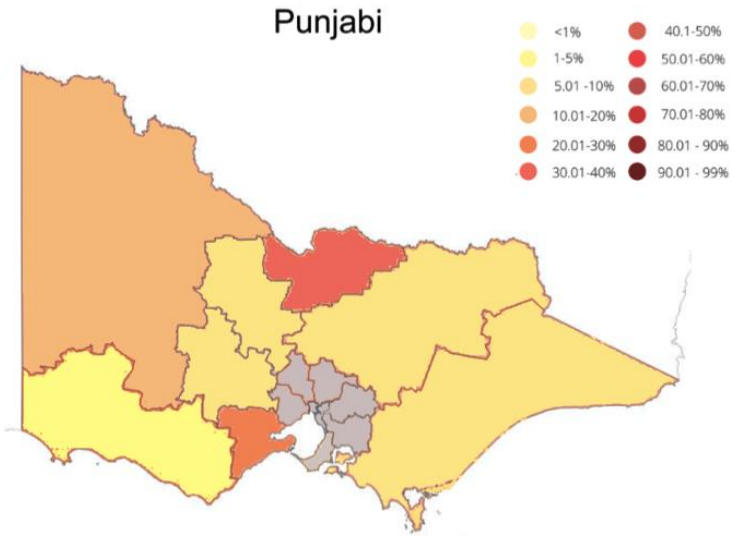
Punjabi
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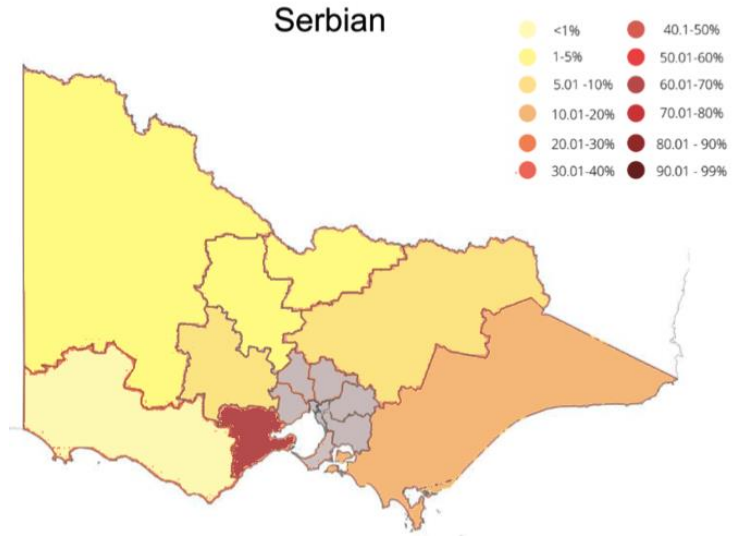
Serbian
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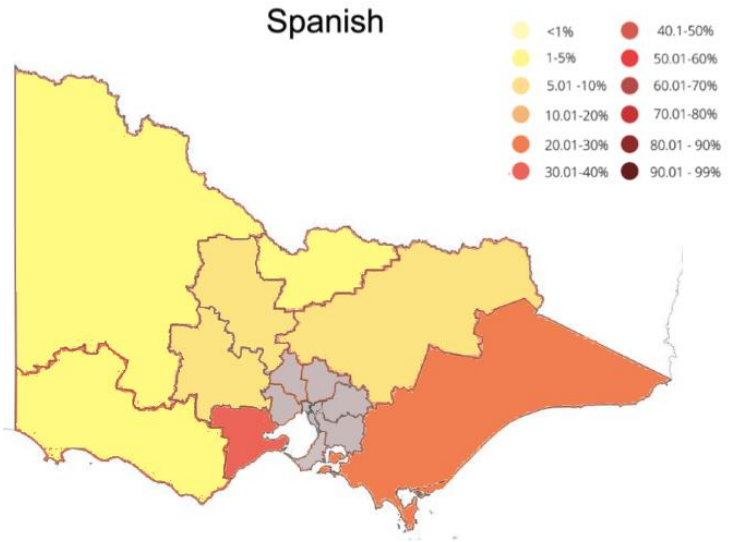
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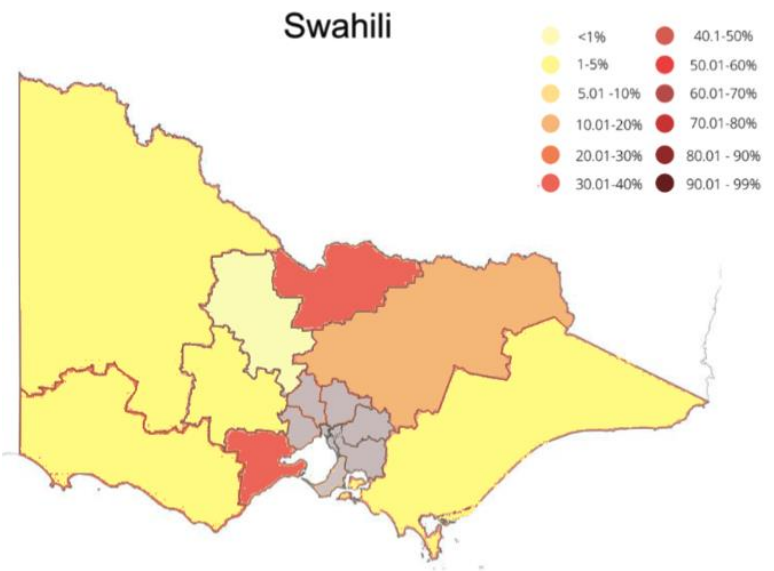
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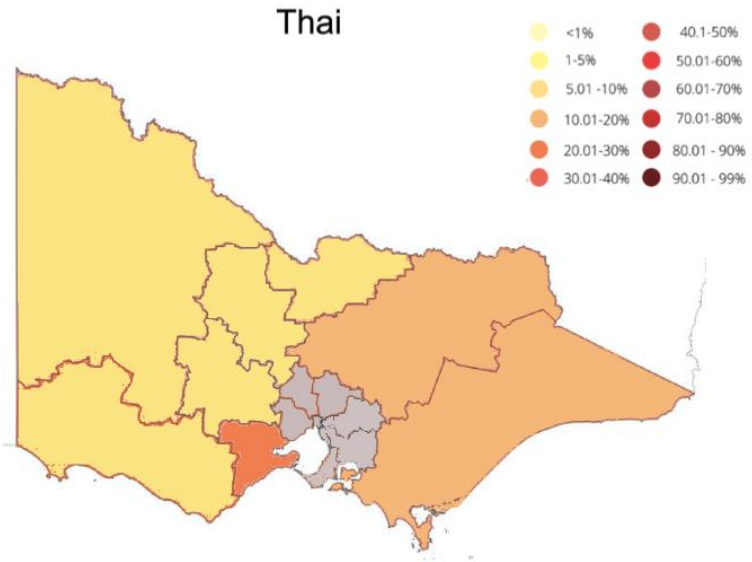
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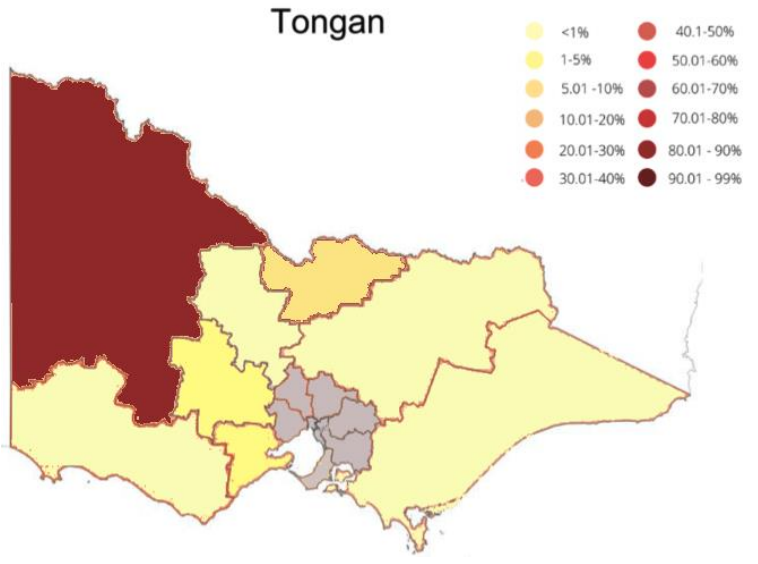
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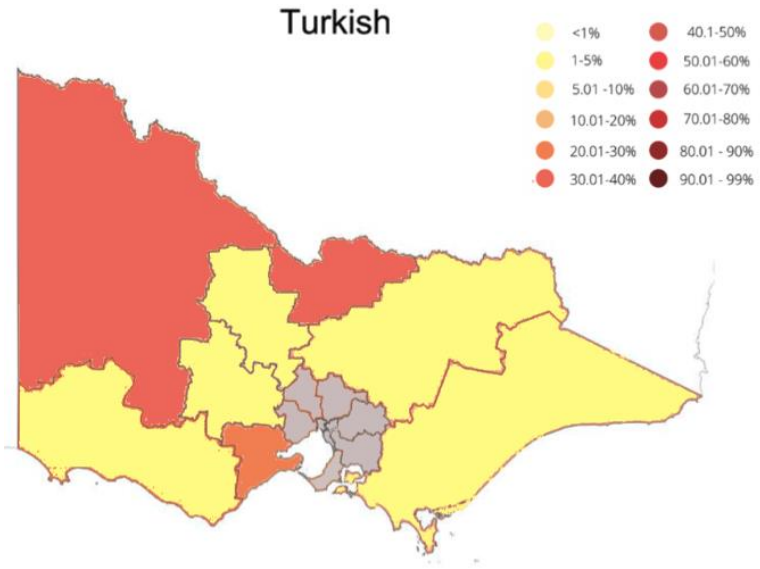
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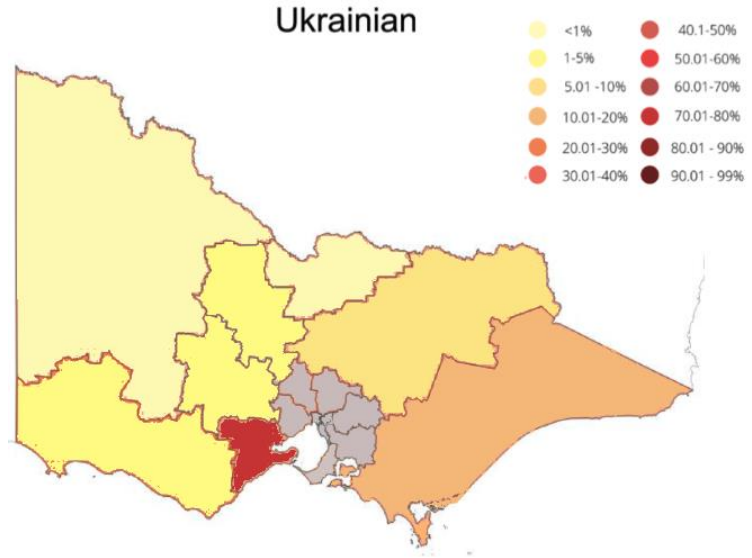
Ukrainian
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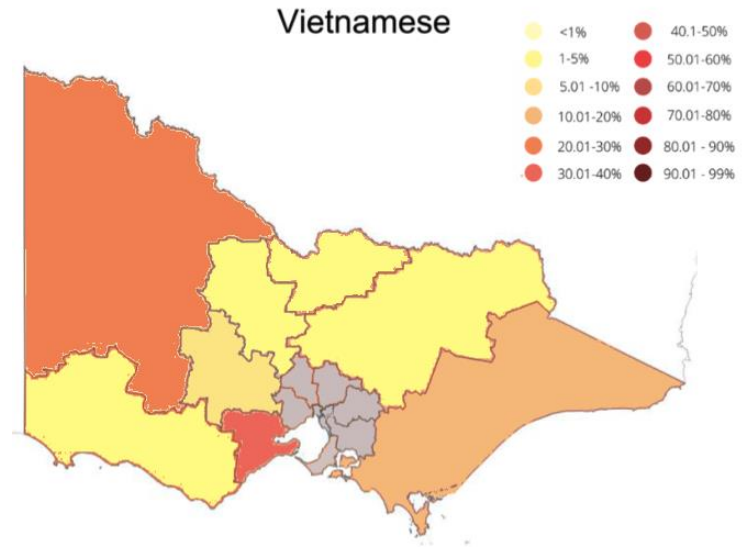
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Gender and Language Groups

Looking at the whole population of people speaking a language other than English at home, the 2021 Settlement Data reports an almost complete balance between the male and female gender, with 50.1% being female.

As is evident from Table 3, among language groups with a gender difference greater than 5%, most South Asian and Middle Eastern languages tend to have more male speakers.

	Languages with +5% difference in gender (2016 Census)
Male	Akan, Arabic, Assyrian Neo-Aramaic, Bari, Bengali, Bosnian, Burmese, Burmese and Related Languages (nec), Chinese (nfd), Dari, Dinka, Eastern European Languages (nfd), Gaelic (Scotland), Greek, Hakka, Hazaraghi, Hebrew, Hindi, Igbo, Indo-Aryan (nec), Irish, Kashmiri, Kinyarwanda (Rwanda), Krio, Malayalam, Mauritian Creole, Nauruan, Ndebele, Nepali, Oriya, Pashto, Romanian, Pashto, Pidgin (nfd), Punjabi, Romanian, Shilluk, Slovak, Southeast Asian Austronesian Languages (nec), Southern Asian Languages (nfd), Swiss, Tamil, Telugu, Tetum, Tok Pisin (Neomelanesian), Tokelauan, Tongan, Urdu, Uzbek, Welsh, Yoruba.
Female	African Languages (nec), African Languages (nfd), Albanian, Amharic, Armenian, Balochi, Bisaya, Bulgarian, Cebuano, Chin Haka, Danish, Dutch, Estonian, Fijian Hindustani, Filipino, Finnish, French, French Creole (nfd), German, Harari, Hungarian, Indonesian, Japanese, Khmer, Kirundi (Rundi), Konkani, Kurdish, Lao, Latvian, Lithuanian, Mandarin, Maori (Cook Island), Maori (New Zealand), Marathi, Min Nan, Niue, Norwegian, Nuer, Other Southern Asian Languages, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Serbo-Croatian/Yugoslavian, Shona, Spanish, Swahili, Swedish, Tagalog, Thai, Tswana, Ukrainian.

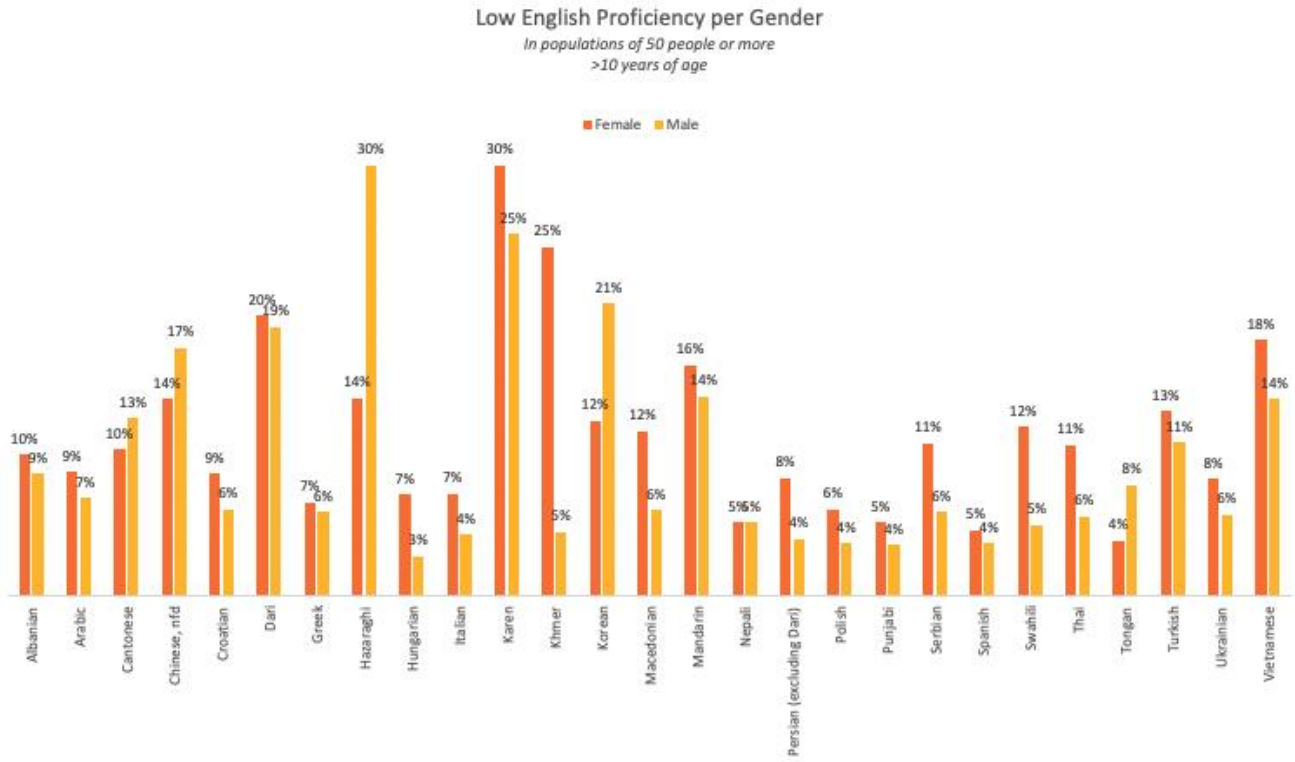
Table 3: Languages with 5% difference in gender. >50 speakers aged over 10 years old. 2016 Census Data.

Table 4 and Graph 3 below outline the percentage of speakers who reported low English proficiency split into gender for the top 27 languages with low English proficiency as outlined in Graph 1.

Language	Female	Male
Albanian	9.9%	8.6%
Arabic	8.7%	6.9%
Cantonese	10.3%	12.5%
Chinese, nfd	13.8%	17.4%
Croatian	8.6%	6.1%
Dari	19.7%	18.9%
Greek	6.6%	5.9%
Hazaraghi	13.9%	30.2%
Hungarian	7.1%	2.8%
Italian	7.2%	4.3%
Karen	30.2%	25.4%
Khmer	24.5%	4.5%
Korean	12.3%	20.5%
Macedonian	11.6%	6%

Mandarin	16.2%	14%
Nepali	5.2%	5.2%
Persian (excluding Dari)	8.3%	4%
Polish	6.1%	3.7%
Punjabi	5.2%	3.6%
Serbian	10.7%	5.9%
Spanish	4.6%	3.7%
Swahili	11.9%	5%
Thai	10.6%	5.6%
Tongan	3.9%	7.8%
Turkish	13%	10.8%
Ukrainian	8.2%	5.7%
Vietnamese	18%	13.8%

Table 4: Gender split for the top 27 languages of low English proficiency. 2016 Census data. Calculated out of all speakers independently of English level.



Graph 3: Low English proficiency per gender in populations of 50 people or more, above 10 years of age. 2016 Census data.

Generally, in languages characterised by low English proficiency women report greater difficulties with English compared to men speaking the same languages. The exceptions are Chinese nfd, Hazaragi, Korean, Tongan and Cantonese, which follow the same trend as those language communities in Metropolitan Melbourne. Nevertheless, for many languages the difference is small, except for Khmer.

A limitation of the above data is that some speakers did not indicate their gender or their levels of English proficiency.

Appendix 3 contains gender data for the above languages per region.

In the 2021 Settlement Data, only Geelong and Shepparton indicated less than a 5% between male and female migrants and refugees. The data also reports a higher percentage of female respondents across all regions, except for Geelong where there is a gender balance.

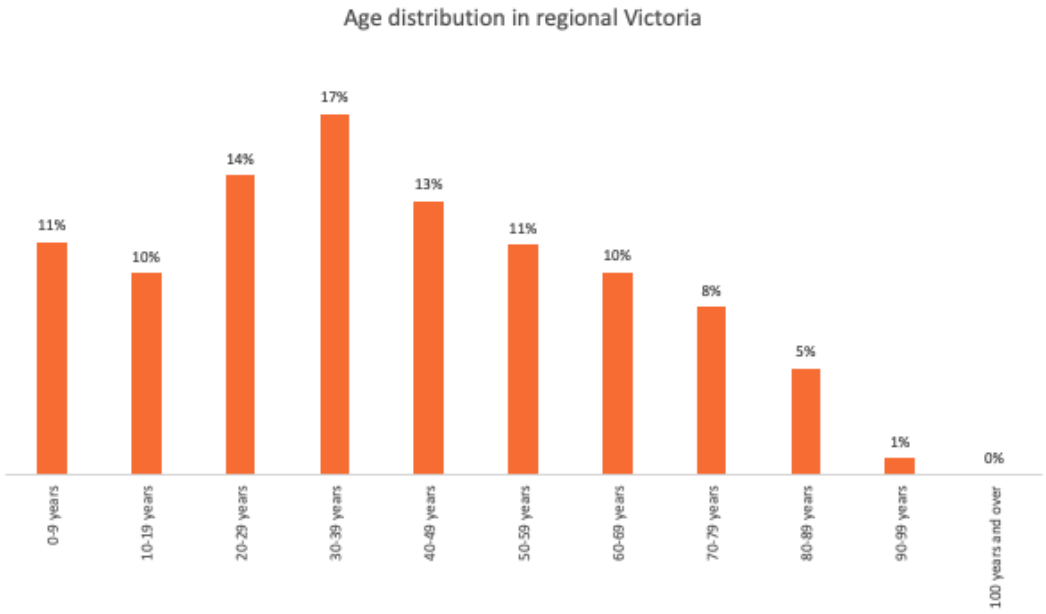
Regions	Female	%	Male	%	Total
Ballarat	3,804	53%	3,379	47%	**7,183**
Bendigo	4,054	53%	3,647	47%	**7,701**
Geelong	12,027	50%	11,851	50%	**23,878**
Hume	3,791	55%	3,049	45%	**6,840**
Latrobe - Gippsland	5,895	56%	4,566	44%	**10,461**
North West	3,939	53%	3,459	47%	**7,398**
Shepparton	4,925	52%	4,625	48%	**9,550**
Warrnambool and South West	2,421	56%	1,902	44%	**4,323**
Total	**40,856**	**53%**	**36,478**	**47%**	**77,334**

Table 5: 2021 Settlement data. Gender split across regions.

English proficiency and age

Age distribution in regional Victoria

The 2021 Settlement data shows that migrants arriving in regional Victoria are generally between 25 and 34 years old (34%), compared to the 2016 Census data which reports most migrants in regional Victoria being between 30-39 years old. This aligns with national trends and data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics showing that skilled visa holders and family visa holders tend to arrive in Australia around the age of 30 years old, compared to 22 years old for humanitarian entrants and student visa holders.[3] The age distribution for regional Victoria according to the 2016 Census data is illustrated below in Graph 4.



Graph 4: 2016 Census data. Age distribution in regional Victoria for residents speaking a language other than English as their main language at home.

Appendix 4 contains a comparison of the age distribution between 2016 Census data and 2021 Settlement data for each region. Of particular note is that the 2021 Settlement Data shows that fewer than 5% of people speaking another language than English at home in each region are over 65 years of age.

There is no particular difference in age distribution to note between different areas in regional Victoria.

English proficiency based on age

The 2016 Census data shows a decline in levels of English Proficiency among people in the older age brackets, with 18% of people aged over 60 who reported speaking a language other than English at home also reporting Low English proficiency. This compares to 7% for younger population groups (0-

[3] Australian Bureau of Statistic. (2018). Spotlight on net overseas migration. https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/featurearticlesbyCatalogue/7A40A407211F35F4CA257A2200120EAA

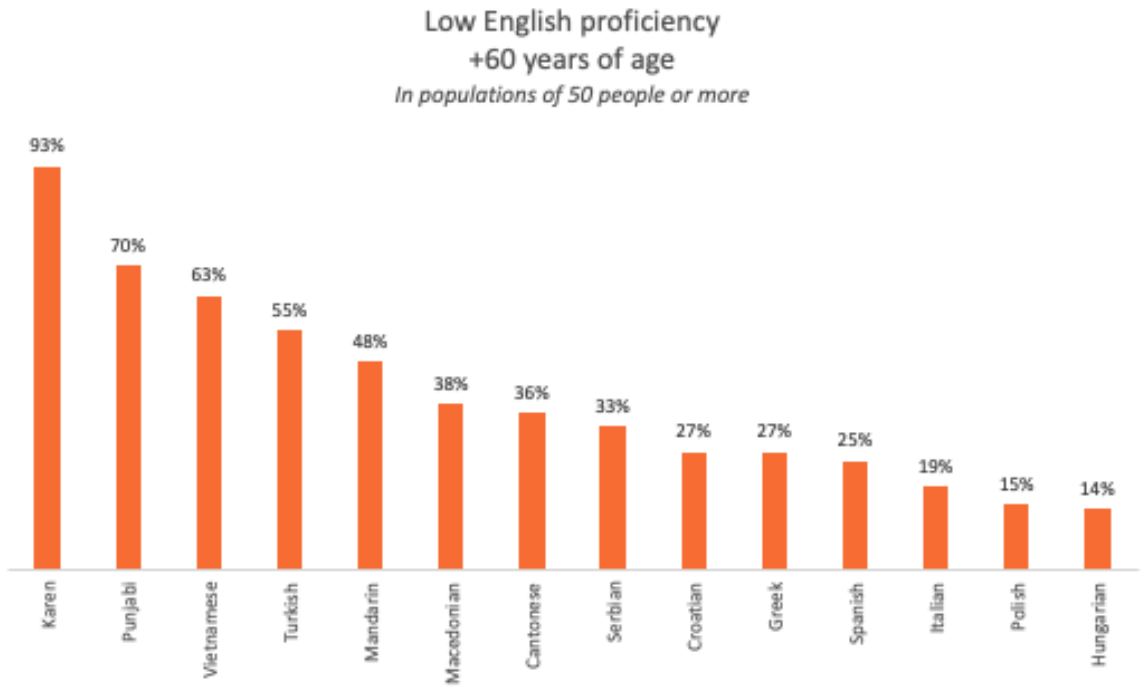
59 years old). When looking at an older age bracket, that percentage increases to a quarter of the population for people aged over 80. For teenagers and 30–39-year-olds, levels of English proficiency are much higher with only 6% and 10% respectively reporting low English proficiency.

From 10 to 69 years, the difference between men and women is minimal. However, from the age of 70 years old, discrepancies between gender start to show, with more women reporting low English proficiency than men.

Low English proficiency based on age	Total	Female	Male
10-19 years	6%	5%	6%
20-29 years	15%	15%	15%
30-39 years	10%	10%	10%
40-49 years	11%	11%	11%
50-59 years	13%	13%	13%
60-69 years	13%	13%	12%
70-79 years	18%	20%	16%
80-89 years	25%	29%	19%
90-99 years	25%	25%	23%

Table 6: 2016 Census data. Percentage of people who speak a language other than English at home who reported low English proficiency, per age group and gender.

Graph 5 shows the percentage of speakers over 60 years old who reported low English proficiency. The trend of a decline in English proficiency for older age brackets is supported across languages reporting low English proficiency. Of particular note is Punjabi, where only 9% of speakers reported low English proficiency when analysing data for all groups but 70% of speakers aged over 60 reported low English proficiency.



Graph 5: Percentage reporting low English proficiency among individuals aged over 60 in languages with more than 50 speakers having reported low English proficiency. 2016 Census data.

Appendix 5 shows languages with low English proficiency for each age group from the age of 0-59 with more than 50 speakers. Both Vietnamese and Karen speakers report low levels of English proficiency across all age brackets.

Table 7 below shows low English proficiency based on age and language. The languages have been grouped into two groups; new and emerging languages and languages that can be identified as traditional following earlier migration patterns. From the data below we can conclude that new and emerging languages report higher percentages of lower English proficiency across all age brackets compared to more traditional migratory languages such as Greek and Italian.

	Low English Proficiency				High English Proficiency	Low English Proficiency
	10-29	30-49	50-69	70+	All Ages	
Traditional languages	**2%**	**2%**	**8%**	**29%**	**87%**	**13%**
Albanian	0%	11%	40%	29%	81%	19%
Croatian	2%	1%	10%	33%	85%	15%
Greek	0%	1%	9%	33%	87%	13%
Hungarian	0%	0%	5%	18%	90%	10%
Italian	3%	2%	4%	26%	88%	12%
Macedonian	2%	3%	17%	52%	82%	18%
Polish	0%	0%	10%	22%	90%	10%
Serbian	0%	4%	22%	42%	83%	17%
Ukrainian	0%	0%	5%	34%	86%	14%
New and emerging	**13%**	**27%**	**55%**	**60%**	**76%**	**24%**
Arabic	9%	20%	24%	14%	84%	16%
Dari	16%	67%	89%		61%	39%
Hazaraghi	16%	64%	92%		55%	45%
Karen	35%	79%	96%	100%	44%	29%
Khmer	20%	29%	44%	100%	71%	29%
Nepali	0%	9%	87%	100%	90%	10%
Persian (excluding Dari)	4%	16%	16%	0%	88%	12%
Punjabi	2%	6%	56%	72%	91%	9%

Table 7: 2016 Census data. Low English proficiency across age groups and language groups.

Education levels

A longitudinal study from the Department of Social Services in 2017 indicated that people with higher levels of education prior to migrating to Australia reported higher levels of English proficiency. In contrast, migrants arriving in Australia with little or no formal education in their own language, tended to face challenges in acquiring English proficiency.[iii]

Table 8 below supports the correlation, with only 11-20% of Karen and Hazaraghi speakers (two language groups with the highest percentage of low English Proficiency in regional Victoria) holding academic qualifications past high school. Hazaraghi and Karen are languages spoken by humanitarian entrants who may have had limited access to or had their education interrupted due to displacement and instabilities in their home country.

One exception that should be noted are Pacific languages who generally report high levels of English proficiency (as English is often an official government language) but lower levels of education. However, Tongan speakers residing in regional Victoria have both low English proficiency and education level.

Percentage with qualifications past high school	Languages
0-10%	Burmese and Related Languages (nec), Burmese and Related Languages (nfd), Catalan, Chin Haka, Dhivehi, Gilbertese, Kinyarwanda (Rwanda), Kriol, Luo, Motu, Niue, Norf'k-Pitcairn, Other Southern Asian Languages, Papua New Guinea Languages (nec), Romany, Somali, Southeast Asian Austronesian Languages (nec), Timorese, Tokelauan
11-20%	Hazaraghi*, Karen*, Tongan*
21-30%	Albanian*, Dari*, Turkish*, Khmer*, Iranic (nfd), Kirundi (Rundi)**, Tibetan, Hakka**, Chinese (nfd)*, Pashto**, Maori (Cook Island), Maltese
31-40%	Luganda, Italian*, Macedonian*, Lao**, Nauruan, Greek*, Vietnamese*, Samoan**, Croatian*
41-50%	Serbo-Croatian/Yugoslavian**, Amharic, Serbian*, Nuer**, Thai*, Slovene**, African Languages (nfd), Frisian, Tok Pisin (Neomelanesian), Pidgin, Bosnian**, Arabic*, Hungarian*, Fijian, Maori (NZ), Swahili*, Mauritian Creole, Cantonese*, Fijian Hindustani, Kurdish**
51-60%	Ukrainian*, Lithuanian, Romanian, Estonian, Malay**, Indo-Aryan, Latvian, Dutch, Mandarin*, Polish*, Finnish, African Languages (nec), Korean*, Ilonggo, Pacific Austronesian Languages (nec), Ewe**, Burmese**, Indonesian, Bisaya, Armenian

Table 8: 2016 Census data. Percentage of people with qualifications higher than high school.
**Top 27 languages with low English proficiency.*
*** Languages with low English proficiency but less than 50 speakers in regional Victoria.*

Conclusion

It is crucial for government to understand the spread of languages across regions in regional Victoria and the level of English proficiency among particular language groups to inform communication and engagement strategies that are targeted to areas of greatest need. This is particularly important during the present COVID-19 pandemic, where low English proficiency impacts upon vaccine hesitancy and susceptibility to misinformation and misconceptions.

Appendixes

Appendix 1: Top 30 languages per region

Languages noted with an asterisk (*) in **Appendix 1** are identified languages with low English proficiency.

Ballarat

2021 Settlement Data Top 30 Languages (June 2021)	Total	2016 Census Top 30 Language (2016)	Total
English	2,066	English	122,023
Mandarin*	289	Mandarin*	778
Punjabi*	181	Italian*	337
Malayalam	112	German	279
Hindi	105	Dutch	238
Thai*	94	Greek*	211
Arabic*	86	Hindi	211
Nepali*	81	Punjabi*	195
Tagalog	72	Tagalog	183
Filipino	64	French	176
Urdu	63	Croatian*	175
Chinese, nfd*	61	Malayalam	173
Sinhalese	54	Cantonese*	161
Telugu	54	Maltese	147
Japanese	50	Arabic*	144
Vietnamese*	47	Filipino	143
Bengali	45	Spanish*	142
Spanish*	43	Vietnamese*	137
African Languages, nfd	43	Japanese	115
Chinese, nec	41	Serbian*	109
German	40	Thai*	100
Korean*	37	Hungarian*	86
Indonesian	36	Afrikaans	74
Russian	36	Russian	73
Gujarati	31	Urdu	73

Ewe	30	Tamil	72
French	29	Sinhalese	69
Tamil	27	Polish*	68
Cantonese*	22	Bengali	63
Nuer	21	Nuer	54
Dutch	20	Gujarati	53

Bendigo

2021 Settlement Data Top 30 Languages (June 2021)	Total	2016 Census Top 30 Language (2016)	Total
English	2,047	English	117,806
Karen*	631	Karen*	675
Karen S'gaw	410	Mandarin*	599
Mandarin*	165	Italian*	309
Malayalam	137	German	253
Punjabi*	123	Greek*	224
Filipino	98	Filipino	182
Thai*	95	Punjabi*	167
Arabic*	94	Hindi	165
Burmese / Myanmar	88	Tagalog	162
Tagalog	81	Malayalam	154
Hindi	76	French	131
Chinese, nfd*	57	Arabic*	126
Indonesian	54	Cantonese*	126
Vietnamese*	52	Spanish*	110
German	44	Dutch	99
Sinhalese	44	Sinhalese	91
Dinka	40	Afrikaans	79
Nepali*	40	Thai*	77
Dari*	40	Vietnamese*	73
Karen Pwo	35	Indonesian	68
Cantonese*	35	Tamil	59

Spanish*	35	Japanese	49
Telugu	33	Maltese	47
French	32	Croatian*	46
Korean*	32	Urdu	43
Chinese, nec	32	Gujarati	41
Urdu	31	Dari*	37
Gujarati	29	Nepali*	35
Hazaragi*	28	Korean*	35
Japanese	26	Hungarian*	34
Russian			

Geelong

2021 Settlement Data Top 30 Languages (June 2021)	Total	2016 Census Top 30 Language (2016)	Total
English	6,784	English	205,000
Punjabi*	545	Italian*	2,477
Arabic*	514	Croatian*	2,037
Mandarin*	501	Mandarin*	1,609
Karen*	462	Macedonian*	982
Hindi	379	Greek*	967
Telugu	355	German	909
Dari*	278	Serbian*	729
Chinese, nfd*	272	Vietnamese*	666
Malayalam	267	Punjabi*	653
Thai*	248	Dutch	557
Serbian*	235	Arabic*	554
Karen S'gaw	230	Spanish*	545
Urdu	217	Hindi*	518
Vietnamese*	204	Tagalog	501
Tagalog	198	Polish*	484
Croatian*	196	Karen*	443
Hazaragi*	175	Filipino	427
Nepali*	170	Cantonese*	416

Gujarati	165	French	410
Swahili*	164	Persian (excluding Dari)*	373
Spanish*	163	Malayalam	306
Sinhalese	159	Turkish*	303
Cantonese*	138	Ukrainian*	275
Bosnian	134	Thai*	272
Filipino	122	Hazaraghi*	262
Chinese, nec	121	Dari*	262
Farsi (Persian)	117	Russian	248
Bengali	115	Maltese	246
Farsi (Afghan)	114	Indonesian	237
German	110	Sinhalese	223

Hume

2021 Settlement Data Top 30 Languages (June 2021)	Total	2016 Census Top 30 Language (2016)	Total
English	2,162	English	131,645
Swahili*	285	Italian*	1,395
Nepali*	218	German	578
Punjabi*	121	Mandarin*	441
Mandarin*	110	French	212
Tagalog	106	Tagalog	210
Thai*	87	Nepali*	200
Filipino	75	Greek*	192
Malayalam	66	Punjabi*	191
German	62	Croatian*	176
Hindi	58	Filipino	159
Arabic*	54	Dutch	149
French	49	Spanish*	143
Kinyarwanda / Rwanda	47	Cantonese*	143
Chinese, nfd*	44	Thai*	136
Urdu	38	Arabic*	126

Vietnamese*	37	Hindi	123
Spanish*	35	Japanese	112
Albanian*	33	Malayalam	105
Japanese	32	Serbian*	77
Russian	32	Sinhalese	74
Telugu	31	Chinese, nfd*	70
Sinhalese	31	Polish*	65
Croatian*	27	Afrikaans	57
Tamil*	25	Swahili*	56
Korean*	24	Indonesian	54
Dutch	24	Maltese	48
Italian*	22	Tamil*	46
Indonesian	19	Hungarian*	45
Gujarati	18	Korean*	45
Serbian*	17	Russian	39

Latrobe – Gippsland

2021 Settlement Data Top 30 Languages (June 2021)	Total	2016 Census Top 30 Language (2016)	Total
English	3,485	English	208,775
Tagalog	238	Italian*	1,915
Mandarin*	210	Mandarin*	750
Thai*	183	German	702
Punjabi*	151	Dutch	671
Arabic*	148	Greek*	613
Malayalam	131	Tagalog	332
Hindi	102	Spanish*	303
Chinese, nfd*	101	Filipino	285
Vietnamese*	101	Maltese	281
Filipino	96	Polish*	267
Sinhalese	89	Vietnamese*	259
German	79	Arabic*	256

Indonesian	62	French	221
Urdu	57	Cantonese*	211
Spanish*	56	Punjabi*	209
Dutch	52	Malayalam	196
Cantonese*	49	Thai*	195
African Languages, nfd	46	Hindi	190
Russian	45	Croatian*	175
Telugu	44	Afrikaans	166
Tamil	43	Sinhalese	143
Nepali*	41	Hungarian*	121
Dinka	39	Serbian*	118
Italian*	38	Tamil	104
Japanese	35	Russian	102
French	34	Japanese	95
Bengali	34	Bengali	71
Bosnian	34	Urdu	71
Afrikaans	32	Danish	60
Burmese / Myanmar	32	Indonesian	57

North West

2021 Settlement Data Top 30 Languages (June 2021)	Total	2016 Census Top 30 Language (2016)	Total
English	1,317	English	111,828
Dari*	205	Italian*	1,538
Punjabi*	200	Mandarin*	670
Vietnamese*	185	Tongan*	448
Malayalam	165	Vietnamese*	424
Hazaragi*	162	Turkish*	419
Arabic*	154	Greek*	405
Turkish*	143	Punjabi*	356
Mandarin*	140	Hazaraghi*	300
Thai*	107	Malayalam	237

Tagalog	102	Filipino	213
Karen*	95	Cantonese*	207
Filipino	94	Tagalog	197
Swahili*	90	Karen*	161
Nepali*	86	German	159
Hindi	80	Arabic*	127
Karen S'gaw	67	Malay	105
Sinhalese	61	Dutch	104
Chinese, nfd*	53	Thai*	101
Telugu	50	Dari*	100
Afrikaans	47	Hindi	100
Urdu	44	Croatian*	94
Kirundi / Nyarwandwa / Rundi	43	Afrikaans	93
Indonesian	39	Khmer*	92
Cantonese*	35	Sinhalese	87
Tongan*	34	Korean*	86
Malay	32	Tamil	86
Korean*	31	Kirundi (Rundi)	78
Khmer*	31	Spanish*	73
Spanish*	28	French	71
Chinese, nec	28	Indonesian	67

Shepparton

2021 Settlement Data Top 30 Languages (June 2021)	Total	2016 Census Top 30 Language (2016)	Total
English	1,192	English	94,289
Arabic*	1,144	Italian*	1,804
Dari*	446	Arabic*	979
Punjabi*	387	Punjabi*	838
Swahili*	313	Mandarin*	513
Albanian*	254	Turkish*	455
Hazaragi*	242	Hazaraghi*	417

Turkish*	138	Albanian*	391
Malayalam	136	Dari*	376
Thai*	120	Tagalog	253
Farsi (Afghan)	119	Filipino	248
Mandarin*	118	Greek*	248
Tagalog	116	Malayalam	227
Hindi	100	Macedonian*	203
Filipino	71	Samoan	177
Persian*	70	German	154
Urdu	66	Swahili*	142
Sinhalese	57	Cantonese*	136
Gujarati	53	Hindi	135
French	48	Sinhalese	114
Nepali*	42	Thai*	112
Cantonese*	41	Urdu	104
Chinese, nfd*	40	Dutch	101
Indonesian	35	Gujarati	99
African Languages, nfd	34	French	83
Vietnamese*	31	Spanish*	69
Dinka	29	Afrikaans	65
Tamil	27	Tamil	64
Korean*	25	Dinka	60
Indian	24	Persian (excluding Dari)*	57
Bengali	23	Croatian*	53

Warrnambool and South West

2021 Settlement Data Top 30 Languages (June 2021)	Total	2016 Census Top 30 Language (2016)	Total
English	1,431	English	96,979
Mandarin*	114	Mandarin*	472
Arabic*	98	German	144
Thai*	80	Filipino	138

Tagalog	69	Italian*	131
Nepali*	58	Dutch	128
Sinhalese	56	Tagalog	113
Malayalam	55	Arabic*	103
Filipino	48	Greek*	94
Hindi	38	French	93
Punjabi*	34	Korean*	86
Chinese, nfd	33	Thai*	75
German	31	Afrikaans	72
Dutch	31	Cantonese*	65
Nuer	27	Sinhalese	64
Vietnamese*	27	Hindi	63
Russian	26	Indonesian	62
Spanish*	25	Malayalam	56
Indonesian	24	Vietnamese*	53
Korean*	23	Spanish*	52
Japanese	23	Japanese	37
Dinka	21	Punjabi*	34
French	18	Maltese	32
Afrikaans	18	Croatian*	31
Swahili*	17	Hazaraghi*	30
Chinese, nec	14	Russian	30
Cantonese*	13	Polish*	23
Portuguese	13	Tamil	22
Gujarati	12	Chinese, nfd*	17
Hazaragi*	11	Shona	17
Tamil	11	Swedish	17

Appendix 2: Number of individuals self-reported low English proficiency

The table below shows the exact number of people speaking a non-English language as their main language at home who have reported to speak English "not well" or "not at all". The percentage of all speakers of a non-English language as their main language at home has been included as well (numbers in Graph 1). 2016 Census data.

Language	Number of individuals with low English proficiency	% with low English proficiency out of all respondents
Mandarin	1,764	30%
Italian	1,138	11%
Karen	721	56%
Vietnamese	540	32%
Hazaraghi	455	44%
Croatian	408	15%
Arabic	375	16%
Greek	368	12%
Cantonese	334	23%
Turkish	304	24%
Dari	303	39%
Punjabi	232	9%
Macedonian	222	18%
Serbian	181	17%
Thai	173	16%
Korean	168	33%
Spanish	119	8%
Polish	98	10%
Chinese, nfd	88	31%
Albanian	84	19%
Persian (excluding Dari)	74	12%
Khmer	64	29%
Swahili	61	17%
Hungarian	60	10%
Tongan	60	12%
Nepali	52	10%
Ukrainian	51	14%

Appendix 3: Languages with low English proficiency per region segregated by Gender (2016 Census)

The tables below show the gender split per region for all speakers independently of English proficiency based on 2016 Census data.

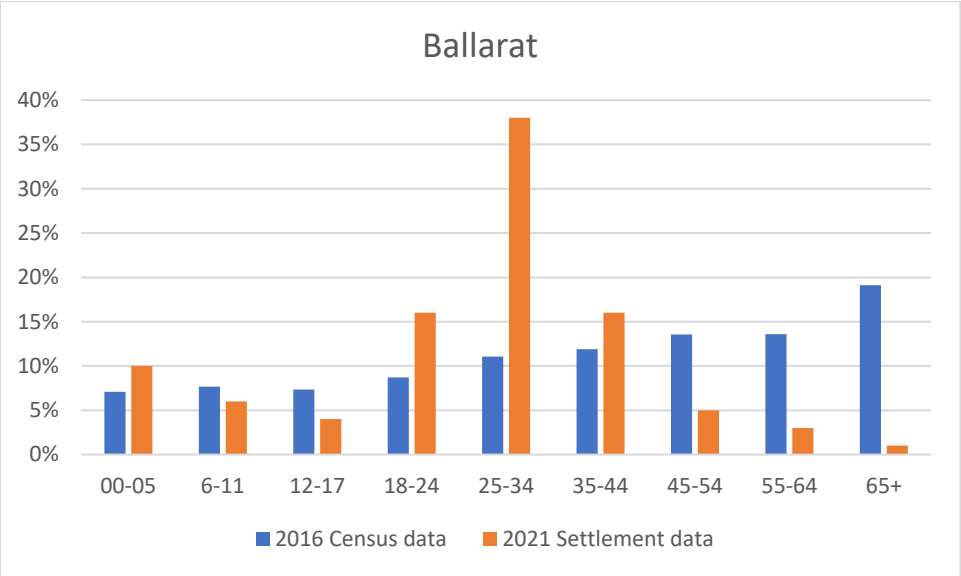
	Ballarat		Bendigo		Geelong		Hume		Latrobe – Gippsland	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Albanian	56%	44%			49%	51%	0%	100%		
Arabic	47%	53%	41%	59%	42%	58%	35%	65%	49%	51%
Cantonese	53%	47%	56%	44%	52%	48%	42%	58%	49%	51%
Chinese, nfd	65%	35%	0%	100%	37%	63%	26%	74%	55%	45%
Croatian	52%	48%	61%	39%	53%	47%	56%	44%	45%	55%
Dari			51%	49%	51%	49%	0%	100%		
Greek	44%	56%	44%	58%	47%	53%	52%	48%	50%	50%
Hazaraghi	0%	100%	0%	100%	38%	62%	0%	100%		
Hungarian	53%	47%	68%	32%	65%	35%	62%	38%	57%	43%
Italian	51%	49%	49%	51%	52%	48%	51%	49%	50%	50%
Karen	100%	0%	52%	48%	53%	47%			0%	100%
Khmer			75%	25%	53%	47%	44%	56%	51%	49%
Korean	64%	36%	66%	34%	55%	45%	56%	44%	40%	60%
Macedonian	64%	36%	100%	0	52%	48%	0%	100%	41%	59%
Mandarin	49%	51%	53%	47%	53%	47%	54%	44%	59%	41%
Nepali	59%	41%	51%	49%	44%	56%	45%	55%	32%	68%
Persian (excluding Dari)	35%	65%	86%	14%	51%	49%	40%	60%	41%	59%
Polish	51%	49%	74%	26%	63%	37%	69%	39%	56%	44%
Punjabi	45%	55%	44%	56%	47%	53%	50%	50%	43%	57%
Serbian	50%	50%	38%	62%	53%	47%	40%	60%	49%	51%
Spanish	56%	44%	50%	50%	59%	41%	45%	55%	50%	50%
Swahili	81%	19%			50%	50%	75%	25%	100%	0%
Thai	73%	27%	77%	23%	69%	31%	80%	20%	73%	27%
Tongan	0%	100%			67%	33%				
Turkish	57%	43%	67%	33%	51%	49%	42%	58%	50%	50%
Ukrainian	63%	38%	100%	0%	54%	46%	73%	27%	64%	36%
Vietnamese	68%	32%	52%	48%	57%	43%	68%	32%	56%	44%

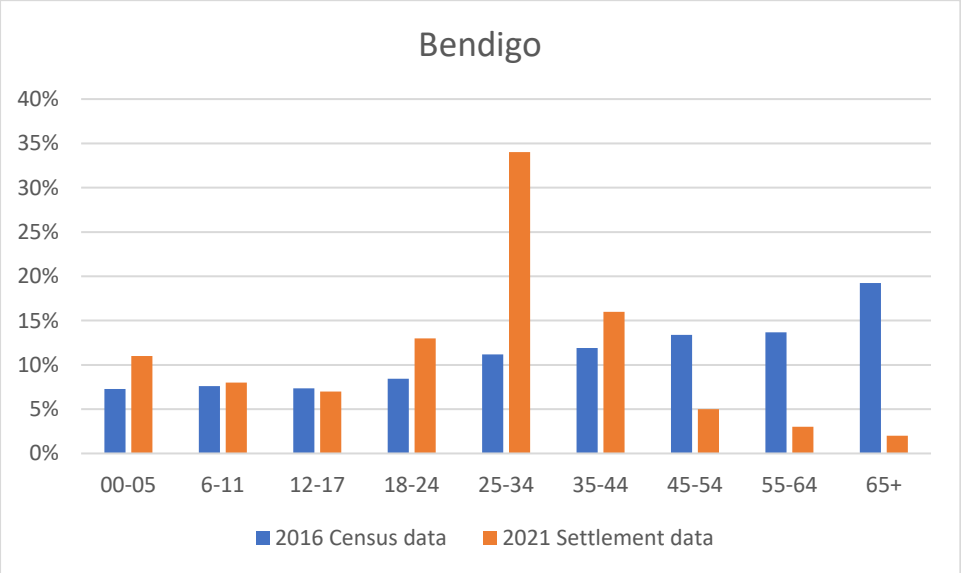
	North West		Shepparton		Warrnambool and South West	
	F	M	F	M	F	M
Albanian			55%	45%	0%	100%
Arabic	35%	65%	49%	51%	38%	62%
Cantonese	55%	45%	68%	32%	32%	68%
Chinese, nfd	50%	50%	50%	50%	35%	65%
Croatian	56%	44%	28%	72%	61%	39%
Dari	45%	55%	44%	56%	0%	100%
Greek	43%	57%	54%	46%	45%	55%
Hazaraghi	29%	71%	31%	69%	0%	100%

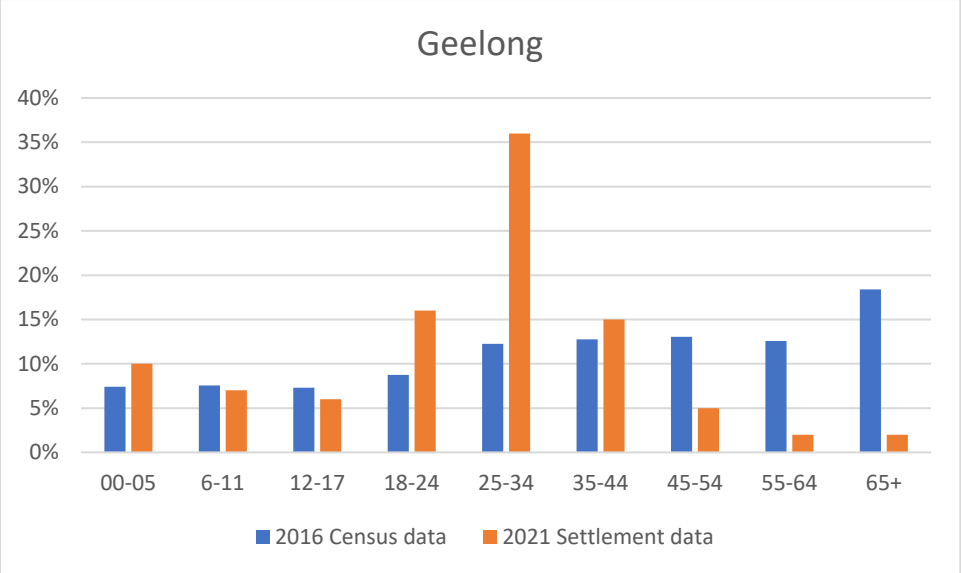
Hungarian	55%	45%	62%	38%	53%	47%
Italian	52%	48%	50%	50%	40%	60%
Karen	44%	56%	0%	100%		
Khmer	62%	38%	100%	0%	100%	0%
Korean	50%	50%	62%	38%	33%	67%
Macedonian			48%	52%		
Mandarin	56%	44%	62%	38%	48%	52%
Nepali	49%	51%	37%	63%	0%	100%
Persian (excluding Dari)	10%	90%	58%	42%	30%	70%
Polish	43%	57%	52%	48%	39%	61%
Punjabi	44%	56%	46%	54%	47%	53%
Serbian	100%	0%	35%	65%	0%	100%
Spanish	59%	41%	49%	51%	63%	37%
Swahili	54%	46%	51%	49%	100%	0%
Thai	68%	32%	63%	37%	69%	31%
Tongan	48%	52%	37%	63%		
Turkish	48%	52%	50%	50%	50%	50%
Ukrainian					44%	56%
Vietnamese	49%	51%	49%	51%	40%	60%

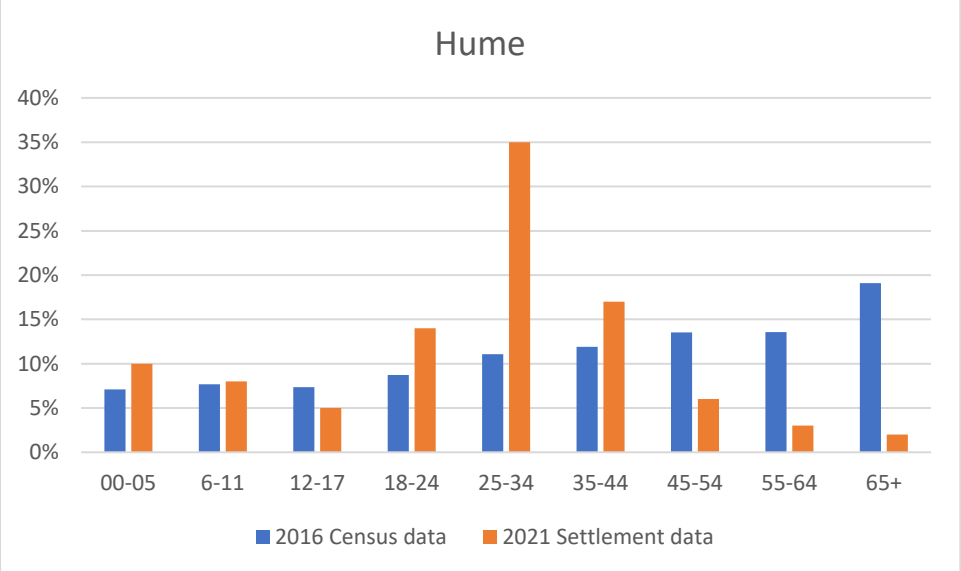
Appendix 4: Age distribution in each region

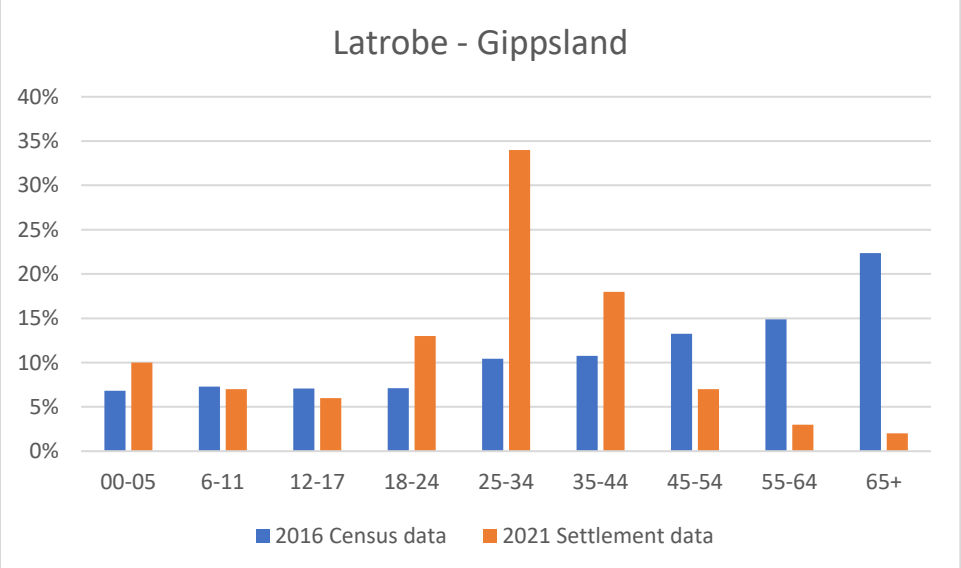
These graphs show the age profile of people who self-reported speaking a primary language other than English at home in the 2016 Census, as compared to the current age distribution of people within the Settlement Database who reside in each Victorian SA4. Please note that, due to Settlement Database data privacy requirements, the 2021 Settlement data on age does include those who reported speaking English as their main language.

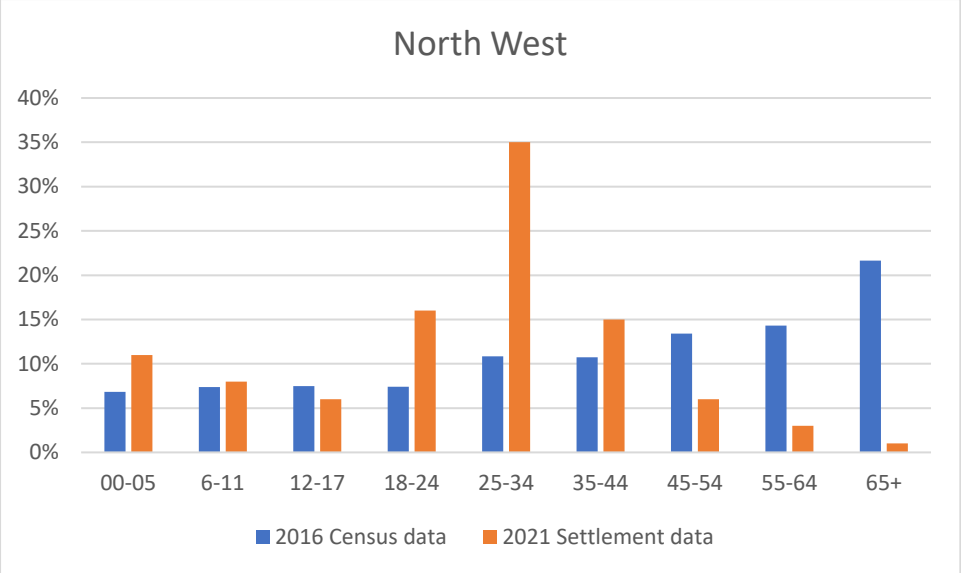


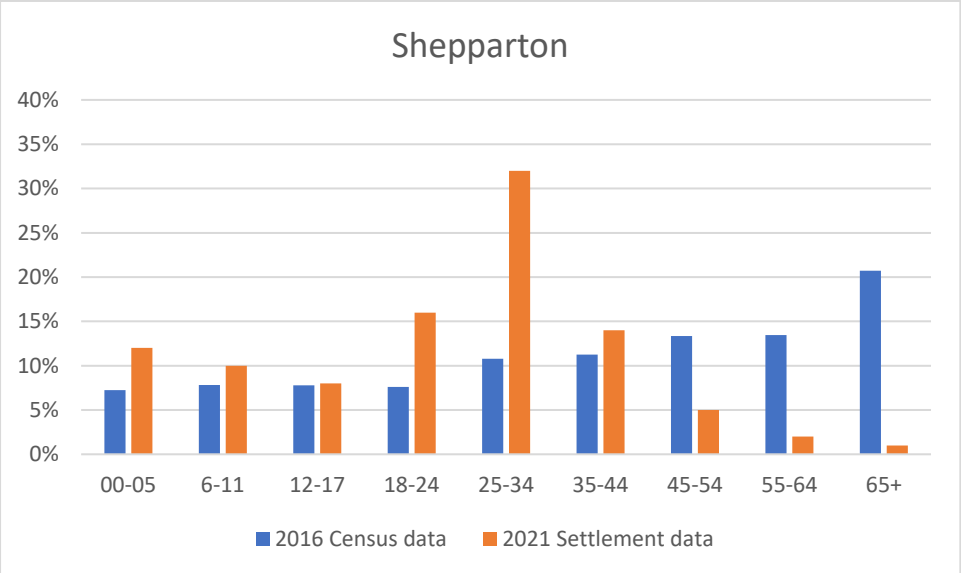


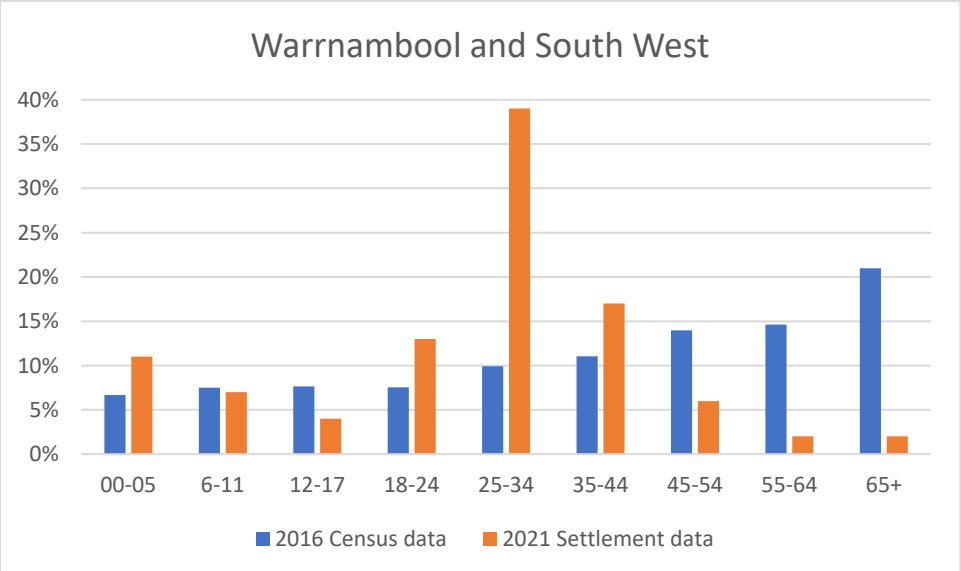

Geelong
40%
35%
30%
25%
20%
15%
10%
5%
0%
00-05
6-11
12-17
18-24
25-34
35-44
45-54
55-64
65+
2016 Census data
2021 Settlement data


Hume
40%
35%
30%
25%
20%
15%
10%
5%
0%
00-05
6-11
12-17
18-24
25-34
35-44
45-54
55-64
65+
2016 Census data
2021 Settlement data


Latrobe - Gippsland
40%
35%
30%
25%
20%
15%
10%
5%
0%
00-05
6-11
12-17
18-24
25-34
35-44
45-54
55-64
65+
2016 Census data
2021 Settlement data


North West
40%
35%
30%
25%
20%
15%
10%
5%
0%
00-05
6-11
12-17
18-24
25-34
35-44
45-54
55-64
65+
2016 Census data
2021 Settlement data

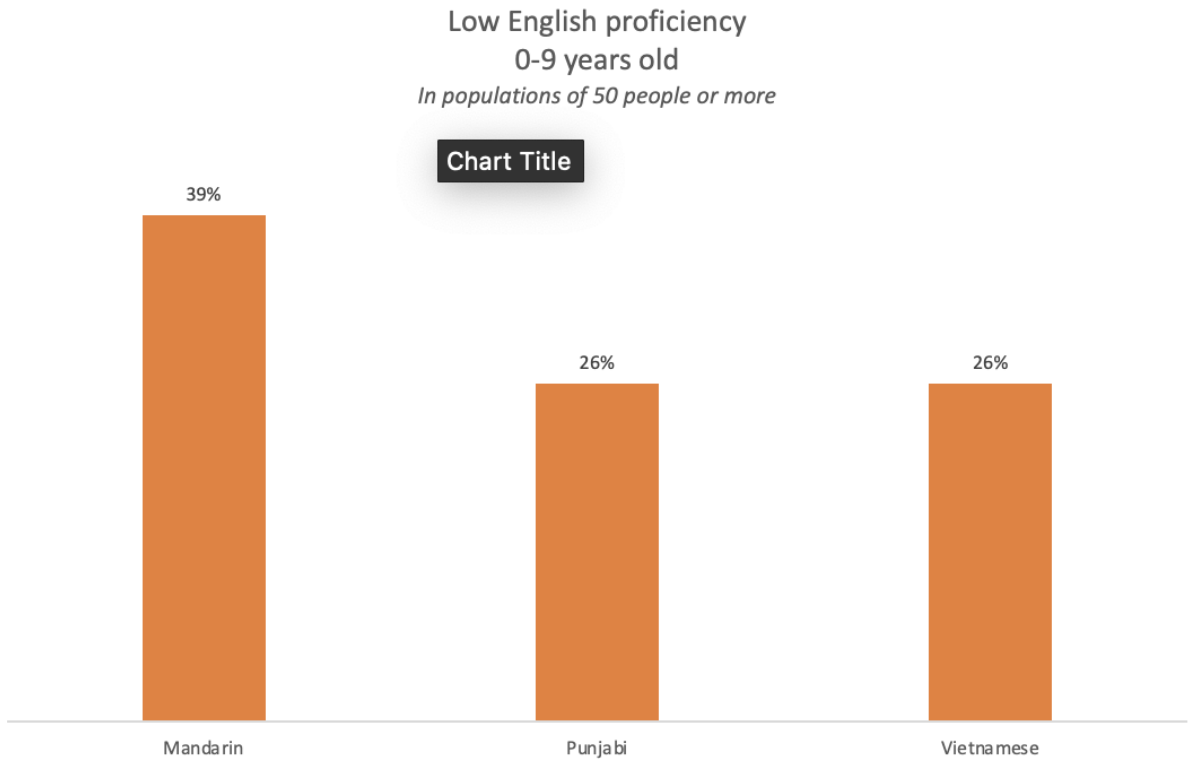

Shepparton
40%
35%
30%
25%
20%
15%
10%
5%
0%
00-05
6-11
12-17
18-24
25-34
35-44
45-54
55-64
65+
2016 Census data
2021 Settlement data

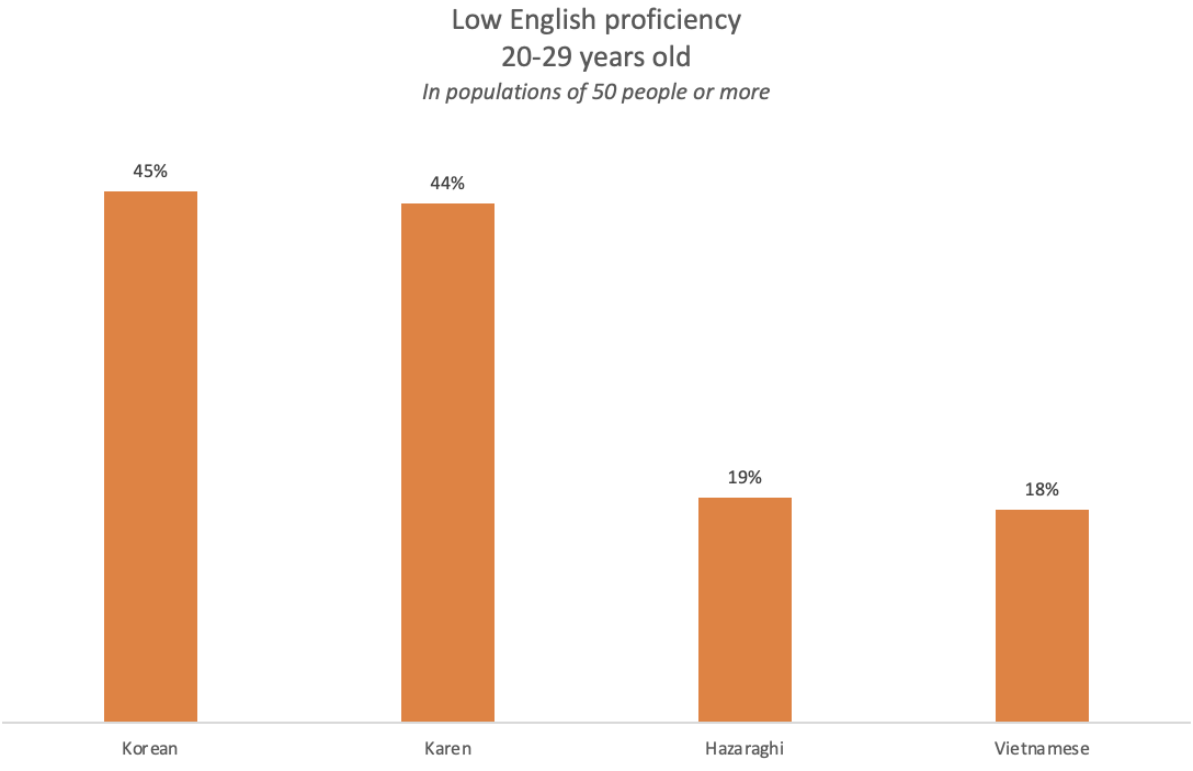

Warrnambool and South West
40%
35%
30%
25%
20%
15%
10%
5%
0%
00-05
6-11
12-17
18-24
25-34
35-44
45-54
55-64
65+
2016 Census data
2021 Settlement data

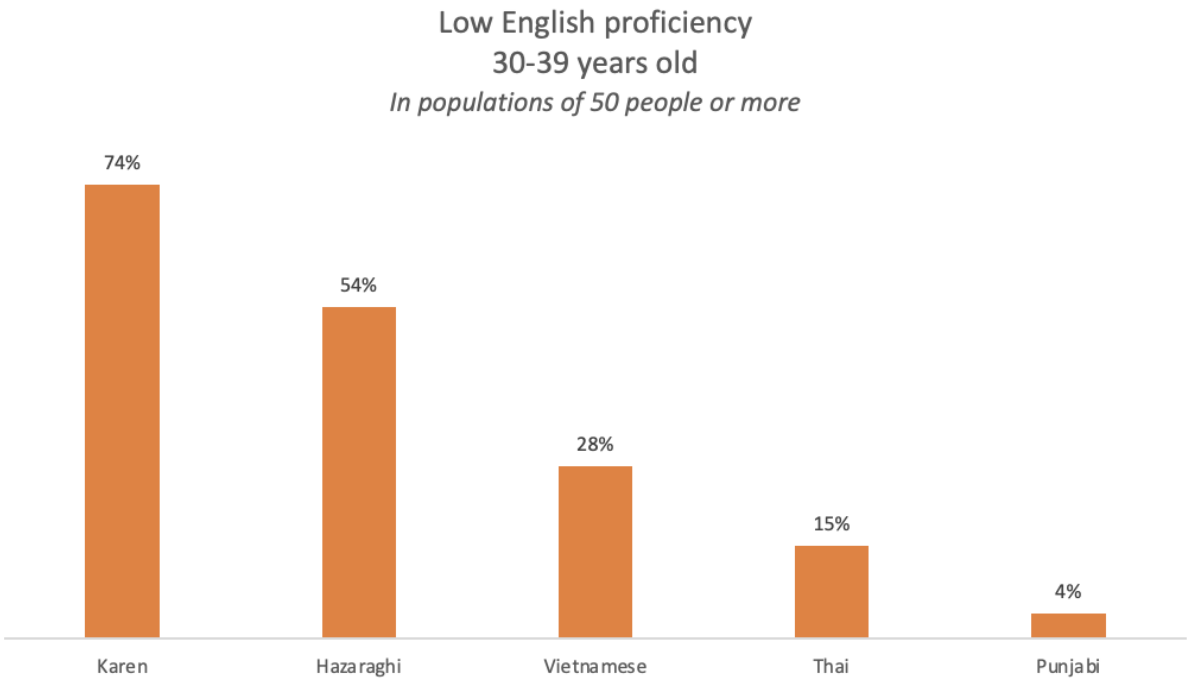
Appendix 5: Low English proficiency per age group

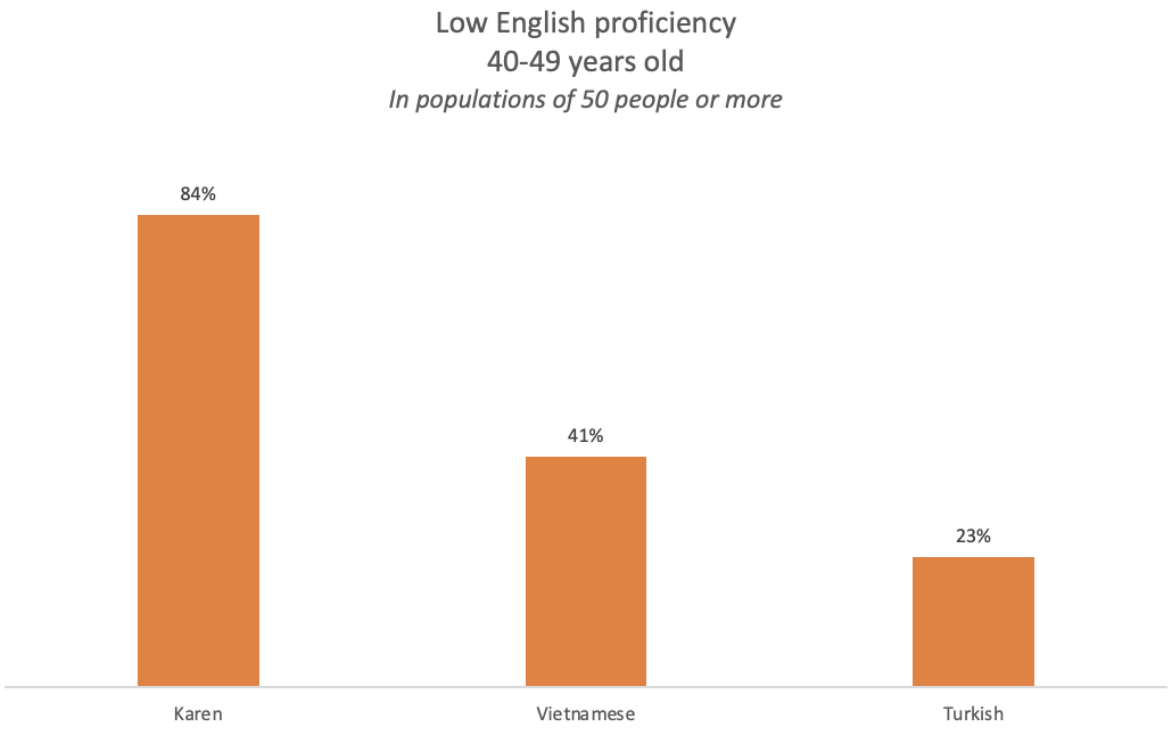
The graphs below show the percentage of speakers with low English proficiency based on age groups (from 0 to 59 years old) where there are more than 50 speakers.

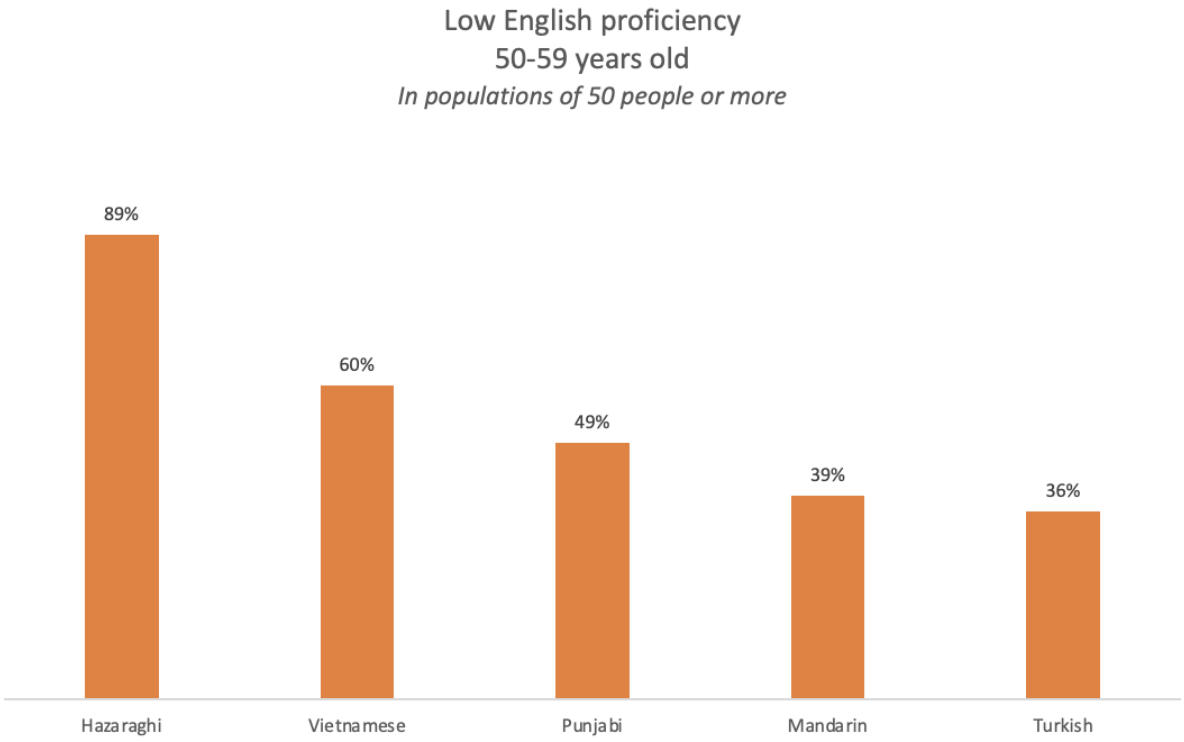
For age bracket 10-19 years old, only Karen speakers had more than 50 speakers reporting low English proficiency (26%), which is why there is no graph for this cohort. (*2016 Census data.)*






Low English proficiency
30-39 years old
In populations of 50 people or more
74%
54%
28%
15%
4%
Karen
Hazaraghi
Vietnamese
Thai
Punjabi


Low English proficiency
40-49 years old
In populations of 50 people or more
84%
41%
23%
Karen
Vietnamese
Turkish


Low English proficiency
50-59 years old
In populations of 50 people or more
89%
60%
49%
39%
36%
Hazaraghi
Vietnamese
Punjabi
Mandarin
Turkish

End notes

[i] NCOSS (2021). Issues, barriers and perceptions about the COVID-19 Vaccine among culturally and linguistically diverse communities in NSW. https://www.ncoss.org.au/policy-advocacy/policy-research-publications/issues-barriers-and-perceptions-about-the-covid-19-vaccine-among-culturally-and-linguistically-diverse-communities-in-nsw/

[ii] NCOSS (2021). *Issues, barriers and perceptions about the COVID-19 Vaccine among culturally and linguistically diverse communities in NSW.*

[iii] Department of Social Services (2017). *Building a New Life in Australia (BNLA): The Longitudinal Study of Humanitarian Migrants'.*