

SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

AFRICAN EXPRESSIONS OF CHRISTIANITY IN AUSTRALIA

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Commissioned by African Australian Advocacy Centre (AAAC)

Purpose:

- highlight the complex relationship between African expressions of Christianity and settlement in Australia;
- offer evidence-based recommendations aimed at government, not-for profit organisations and other settlement support services.

The report draws on findings from the Australian Research Council grant (ARC, DP190102911) titled '**The African Diaspora and Pentecostalism in Australia**' (2019-2023).

According to the Australian 2021 census, **447,523** people were born in an African country, with **742,000** people recording one or both parents as having being born in Africa (ABS 2022).



The data does not capture race. Not all migrants from Africa are negatively racialised in Australia.

African diasporas in Australia are super diverse across all demographic indicators.

Many arrive as refugees but a growing number arrive as international students and through the 'skilled stream' visa category working in professions such as tertiary education, health, and mining.

Religion is key throughout the challenges of migration process:

- Faith provides a sense of personal protection, existential meaning and providence, encouraging resilience and strength.
- Churches are primary institutions through which African migrants seek out support, community, and belonging.

However, some churches' conservative ways are out of step with Australian society at large, particularly regarding gender norms, and may hinder integration and be unappealing to youth born in Australia.

MIGRATION CHALLENGES

1. Language Barriers

Many local churches offer English language and literacy classes, as well as “in language” services and classes to support the migrant and cultural lives of the community.

2. Challenges Living And Making-A-Living

Churches identify and respond to the everyday needs of their congregants, offering spiritual, emotional and material supports, practical information, and networking opportunities.

3. Poor Mental Health

Churches provide religious and sometimes culturally-informed pastoral care. However, they cannot always address the complex mental health needs of congregants.

4. Over-Policing, Incarceration And Immigration Detention

Many churches prioritise youth programs, liaise with law enforcement, and offer pastoral and practical care for those who are incarcerated and their families. But not all churches are attractive to those at risk and may not have the resources to tackle the complex reasons people fall into crime.

5. Growing Up Black In Australia Is Difficult

Churches are important in mediating the difficulties new generations face in Australia. Some churches struggle to stay relevant to youth being raised in a less religious country than their heritage country. Generational conflicts are common.

6. It Is Hard Growing Old In Australia

Churches in Australia offer social solace and care for the elderly. However, reliance on church communities can inhibit their integration.

7. Finding Belonging As A LGBTIQA+ Christian

Many LGBTIQA+ Christians experience ostracism from their diasporic and church communities, and racism in LGBTIQA+ spaces.

8. Experiencing Racism Inside And Outside Spaces Of Faith

Australian faith communities are important supports for those experiencing systemic racism but can also be implicated in perpetrating it.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Governments and NGOs explicitly recognise churches as important sites for settlement support.
2. All settlement support agencies are cognisant of the strong spiritual component in the lives of African Australians to better serve them.
3. Youth Services should collaborate with churches to respond to the complex needs of African Australian youth.
4. Religious leaders be trained in mental health first-aid and on how to access social services.
5. Churches are sites to facilitate public education.
6. Government prioritises the needs of aging African Australians.
7. Churches address issues of racism and cultural literacy.
8. More research is required to understand the experiences of LGBTIQA+ African Christians in Australia.

