

# Immigrant Families: A Statistical Profile

Bureau of Immigration and Population Research, *Immigrant Families - A Statistical Profile, Statistical Report No 12* Canberra, Australian Government Publishing Service, 1994, pp 3-4.

## Summary of Findings

In 1991, just over 31 per cent of family households had a reference person who was born overseas (family reference person: a person aged 15 years or over around whom a family can be constructed, usually Person 1 on the census form). This compares with 24 per cent of non-family households.

The living arrangements of each birthplace group are related in part to its age structure. Groups with a relatively large proportion of elderly people are likely to have a larger proportion living alone, while those with a younger age structure have a larger proportion living in family households. Thus, family households were more prevalent among recent immigrant groups, such as those from most Asian and Middle Eastern countries, than among older groups, such as those born in Europe (with the exception of Southern Europe).

Family households with an overseas-born reference person tended to have more people on average than family households with an Australia-born reference person. Family households where the reference person was of non-English speaking background also tended to have more people than households where the reference person was of an English speaking background. More than 35 per cent of family households with a reference person born in Lebanon and more than 20 per cent of family households with a reference person born in Indochina had six or more people in 1991. More than 10 per cent of family households with the reference person born in the Philippines, Turkey, China or Fiji also had 6 or more people. This compares

with 5 per cent of family households with an Australia-born reference person.

There were 1,318,400 families where the family reference person was overseas-born. Of these, 88 per cent were couple families, 11 per cent were one-parent families, and 1 per cent were other families.

The proportion of families comprising only the couple was lower among families where the reference person was born in a Southern European, Middle Eastern, Asian, South American or African country (less than 20 per cent of all families) than among families where the reference person was born in Australia or one of the main English speaking countries (more than 30 per cent of all families). Families comprising only the couple were either couples whose grown children had left home or couples who did not yet have children. Couples of English speaking background were more likely to be in this situation than couples of non-English speaking background, who were more likely to have children living at home.

Recent immigrant groups which have a relatively younger age structure than older immigrant groups are likely to have a larger proportion of families with dependent children and a smaller proportion with non-dependent children only at home. Compared with the more recent immigrant groups, older immigrant groups such as the European-born had a larger proportion with non-dependent children at home.

There were 143,138 one-parent families in 1991 where the single parent was born overseas or 26 per cent of all one-parent families. Two-thirds (66 per cent) of these families had dependent children present, and the remaining one-third had only non-dependent children.

The proportion of one-parent families tended to

be lower among many immigrant groups than the Australia-born. While 14 per cent of all families with an Australia-born reference person were one-parent families, the proportion of one-parent families was about 8 per cent of families with a Southern European-born reference person and between 8 and 10 per cent among most immigrant families. However, some birthplace groups which have had a significant proportion of people who migrated as refugees had a higher proportion of one-parent families. About 17 per cent of families with a Cambodia-born or Vietnam-born reference person and 20 per cent of families with an El Salvador-born reference person were one-parent families. Families with a Philippines-born or Taiwan-born reference person also had a relatively high proportion of one-parent families (16 to 17 per cent).

A greater proportion of families with the reference person born in Asia (except Japan), the Middle East, South America, Africa or Southern Europe had unpartnered adult relatives living with them than families with the reference person born in Australia or another English speaking country. The proportion of families with other related single adults who could be a parent, brother, sister or other relative of the couple or single parent was 4 per cent among all families in Australia but was more than 20 per cent among families where the reference person was born in Indochina and 19 per cent among families where the reference person was born in the Philippines.

Families with parents born in Lebanon, Indochina and El Salvador had a larger number of dependent offspring as well as a larger number of non-dependent offspring at home than did other families.

In 50 per cent of couple families with dependent children both parents were employed in the work force. The proportion was between 55 and 60 per cent among couple families with dependent children where the reference person was born in South Africa, the Philippines, India or Sri Lanka, but was less than 20 per cent where the reference person was born in Lebanon, Taiwan or El Salvador.

In more than 20 per cent of couple families with dependent children where the reference person was born in Indochina, the Middle East or El Salvador, one or both parents were unemployed. This compares with 7 per cent of all couple families with dependent children.

Just over half of all single parents with dependent children were in the labour force in 1991, and this was true for most overseas-born single parents. A slightly higher rate, over 60 per cent, was observed among single parents born in the main English speaking countries, Western Europe, Eastern Europe and Africa (excluding North Africa). However, only about one-third of single parents born in Lebanon or Turkey who had dependent children were in the labour force.

There was much variation in the unemployment rate of single parents by birthplace. While single parents born in Indochina or the Middle East who had dependent children were relatively few in number, they had unemployment rates that were two to three times higher than the rate for single parents born in Australia.

Among couple families with dependent children, those with the reference person born overseas in a main English speaking country had a higher median income than families with an Australia-born reference person. Families where the reference person was born in an Asian country, such as Malaysia, India, Sri Lanka, Philippines or Hong Kong, also had a higher median family income than families with an Australia-born reference person. Couple families with relatively low incomes were those where the reference person was born in Lebanon or Indochina.

Among one-parent families with dependent children, immigrant families had slightly higher family income when compared with families where the parent was born in Australia. However, there were exceptions: where the single parent was born in Turkey, Lebanon, or some of the Northeast Asian countries, the median family income was much lower than average.