

Church involvement in migrant ministry

Migrants have increasingly become a key component of Australia's population. In 2010, some 29% of Australia's population were born overseas. Of these, more than a quarter have arrived in Australia after 2000, indicating high levels of recent migration¹. Many Australians have been directly impacted by the migrant experience in their own families. Almost half of Australia's population were either born overseas or have a migrant parent, according to the 2011 Census of Population and Housing.²

Churches can potentially offer connection and a sense of belonging for migrants who may be feeling displaced, as well as practical and pastoral support in settling into a new country and local community.

How involved are local Australian churches in intentional ministry towards migrants? In the 2011 National Church Life Survey, a representative from each participating church was asked:

To what extent is this congregation involved in ministry towards migrants?

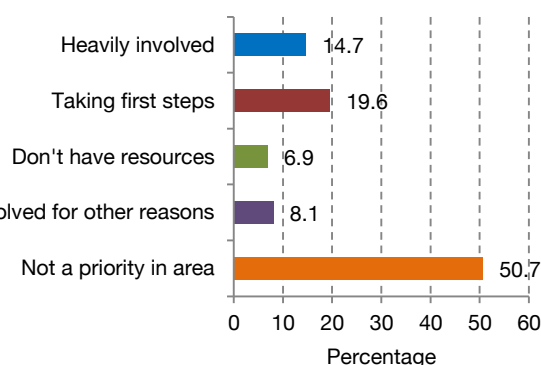
- Heavily involved
- We are taking first steps
- We would like to be involved but do not have the resources
- We are not involved for other reasons
- It is not a priority in our area

Overall results

As shown in Figure 1, over a third (35%) of Australian churches said they were involved in migrant ministry, with 15% heavily involved, and 20% taking first steps. Seven percent of churches reported having insufficient resources to be involved in migrant ministry, and 8% were not involved for other reasons. More than half of

all churches (51%) claimed ministry towards migrants was not a priority in their area.

Figure 1: Local church involvement in ministry towards migrants



Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n=2,347).

Year founded

Newer churches tended to be more likely to be heavily involved in migrant ministry, with 20% of those founded in 2001-2011 and 22% founded in the 1990's, compared to 14% of older churches (see Table 1). Churches founded before 1950 were the least likely to be involved in migrant ministry (32% compared to 40% of younger churches). Similar proportions of churches indicated they didn't have the resources or weren't involved for some other reason. Churches founded in the 1960's and 1980's were least likely to claim migrant ministry wasn't a priority in their area.

Table 1: Migrant ministry by year church founded

	2000-2011	1990-1999	1980-1989	1970-1979	1960-1969	1950-1959	Before 1950
	Percentage						
Heavily involved	20	22	17	16	13	14	13
First steps	20	17	27	22	27	23	19
Don't have resources	9	3	7	6	12	4	8
Other reasons	6	7	8	9	9	9	8
Not a priority	46	51	41	47	39	50	53

Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n=2,000)

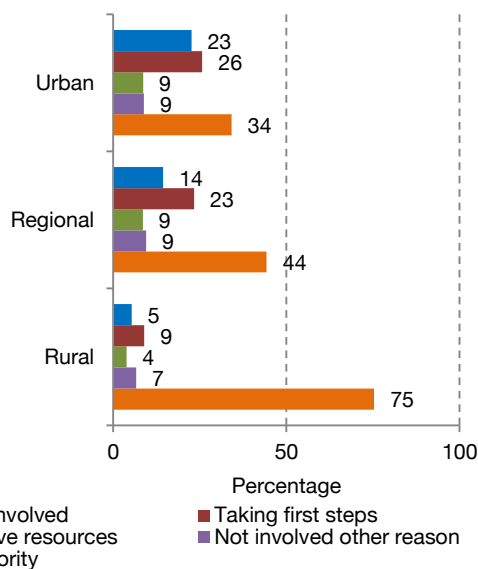
¹<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Products/6250.0~Nov+2010~Main+Features~Overview?OpenDocument>

² <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/statistics/immigration-update/australian-migration-trends-2011-12-glance.pdf>

Locality

Churches in rural areas (75%) were much more likely than urban (34%) and regional churches (44%) to say that multicultural ministry is not a priority in their area (see Figure 2). This makes sense, as most migrants live in urban areas.³ Likelihood of churches being involved in migrant ministry was highest in urban areas (49%), followed by regional areas (37%). Only 14% of rural churches indicated they were involved in this form of ministry.

Figure 2: Migrant ministry by church locality



Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n=2,199).

Denominational Differences

As shown in Table 2, Anglican and Lutheran churches had the lowest involvement in migrant ministry (26% and 23% respectively), although this may partly be related to the stronger rural presence of these denominations. Pentecostal churches had the highest level of involvement, with almost half (48%) either heavily involved or taking first steps. Lutheran churches were most likely to indicate that ministry to migrants was not a priority in their area (65%).

Table 2: Migrant ministry by denomination

	Angli- can	Baptist/ Church- es of Christ	Cath- olic	Luth- eran	Pente- costal	Unit- ing	Other Prot- estant
	Percentage						
Heavily involved	12	16	14	9	21	13	16
First steps	14	25	17	14	27	19	23
Don't have resources	7	8	7	4	7	5	9
Other reasons	8	8	10	7	6	9	9
Not a priority	59	43	52	65	39	54	43

Source: 2011 NCLS Operations Survey (n=2, 347)

Time change

There has been a large increase in the proportion of local churches who claim to be involved in migrant ministry, from 17% of local churches in the 2001 NCLS to 24% in 2006, and 35% in 2011. However, results may not be entirely comparable due to a wording change from 'ethnic ministry' in 2001 and 2006 to 'migrant ministry' in 2011.

Summary

More than a third of Australian churches report being involved in ministry towards migrants, be it heavily involved or just taking first steps. About half of all churches claimed migrant ministry was not a priority in their area. Younger churches and urban churches were most likely to be involved in migrant ministry. Results also differed by denomination, and over time.

Data sources

Castle, K., (2001) [computer file], 2001 NCLS Operations Survey. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

Castle, K., (2006) [computer file], 2006 NCLS Operations Survey. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

Powell, R., (2011) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Operations Survey. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

Citation

Duncum, I., Hancock, N., Pepper, M. & Powell, R. (2014) Church involvement in migrant ministry, NCLS Research Fact Sheet 14008. Adelaide: Mirrabooka Press.

³ <http://www.ncls.org.au/default.aspx?sitemapid=2293>