

FOOTBALL UNITES



Strengthening Multicultural Australia through Football



 **A LEAGUES**

 **CAPITAL FOOTBALL**

 **FOOTBALL NORTHERN TERRITORY**

 **FOOTBALL NSW**

 **FOOTBALL QUEENSLAND**

 **FOOTBALL SOUTH AUSTRALIA**

 **FOOTBALL TASMANIA**

 **FOOTBALL VICTORIA**

 **FOOTBALL WEST**

 **NORTHERN NSW FOOTBALL**

FOREWORD FROM THE CHAIRMAN

The story of Australian football is the story of multicultural Australia.

It is the story of families who arrived here seeking opportunity. Of communities who built clubs as gathering places and cultural homes. Of generations who found belonging on pitches in every postcode of this country.

From our grassroots to our national teams, the multicultural impact of football is unmistakable. Today, our CommBank Matildas and CommBank Socceroos reflect the full breadth of our nation's diversity, mirroring Australia's immigration journey. Where earlier generations were dominated by players with diverse European backgrounds, today's squads proudly include Australians born in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Europe — alongside First Nations Australians. They are a living reflection of modern Australia.

At the grassroots level, the numbers tell a powerful story. More than 215,000 registered footballers nationwide were born overseas, and hundreds of thousands more have their own family immigration stories. Our participants represent over 220 distinct cultural backgrounds. Every weekend, languages, traditions and cultures converge on football pitches across the country — united by a shared love of the game. Facilitated by our Member Federations, our multicultural programs are a crucial part of our work engaging with these communities and providing opportunities to players, coaches, referees and fans outside of the traditional football ecosystem.

As a first-generation Australian, I have always been deeply proud of my heritage and the ancient culture and history from which my family comes. I feel equally blessed that my parents chose Australia as home and raised their family here, and I am immensely proud to be Australian.

Some of my earliest memories are of football grounds filled with different languages, families and cultures. That was simply football — a place where we could celebrate where we came from while knowing we belonged here. Today, it gives me great pride to see Australians from every background come together, wear the Australian jersey, support our heroes and see them represent our great nation on the global stage.

While multiculturalism is natural and deeply embedded in our game, we know we must be deliberate in ensuring football continues to serve all Australians — whether they are third-generation Italian Australians or newly arrived refugee families from Ethiopia. Inclusion does not happen by accident. It requires partnership, investment, and intent.

As the world game, football occupies a unique position in Australia. We are often the first sporting home for new Australians and a foundational point of connection for

communities. Through football, people build friendships, learn new skills, and find shared joy across cultures. But football's impact extends beyond cultural celebration. It is also a platform for employment, education pathways, leadership development, and long-term opportunities.

The AFC Women's Asian Cup 2026™ in Australia was a timely showcase of modern multicultural Australia. The tournament united communities with deep connections to Asia and demonstrated the inclusive spirit that defines our country. A few months later, the CommBank Socceroos' performances at the FIFA World Cup 2026™ showcased a new generation of multicultural football stars.

This paper outlines how Football Australia will continue to engage and uplift multicultural communities — from grassroots participation programs to national competitions and major events. We are particularly proud of our community initiatives, delivered in close partnership with our Member Federations, governments at every level, and community organisations across the country. Throughout, our work reflects Football Australia's values:

- **Welcome** – celebrating, embracing, and empowering diversity
- **Ready** – innovating and adapting our programs
- **Connect** – uniting Australians from the grassroots game to our national teams
- **Excel** – delivering excellence, on and off the pitch
- **Protect** – ensuring integrity, fairness, and safety

There is always more to do. We are committed to working even more closely with our Member Federations, government and the not-for-profit sector to maximise football's capacity to strengthen communities and support social cohesion nationwide.

Multiculturalism is more than just a program – it is a core part of who we are as a football nation.



A stylized, handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a large loop followed by a series of smaller, connected strokes.

Mr Anter Isaac
Chair

NOTES FROM THE HEAD COACHES



Like so many other Italians, my parents moved to Melbourne after the Second World War. They didn't have too many family members move across with them, but we were immersed in Melbourne's Italian community all the same.

I probably grew up more Italian than Australian, and football was a big part of that – both through our local club, Juventus, and global football too. My brothers and I would go to the Cinema Italia and watch five-month-old Juventus matches from the Serie A. We'd wait for special deliveries of the *Guerin Sportivo* and *La Gazzetta dello Sport* to keep up with the Italian game. We made our lives in Australia, but we didn't lose our connection to Italy.

To start as a player at Brunswick Juventus and end up one day coaching the Juventus of Turin – and then the Matildas – makes me feel very fortunate. The immigration story is a pretty remarkable one. We should be proud of the opportunities that football offers to migrants and the way our game brings communities together.

Joe Montemurro

Head Coach – CommBank Matildas



My parents arrived from Croatia, determined to make a positive contribution to their adopted nation, while navigating the challenges of English as a second language.

Football provided both a safety net and an opportunity to integrate, while still preserving their identity. My family, like many others, became members of - and contributors to - a club that has played a significant role in Australian football over many decades.

Sydney Croatia (now Sydney United 58 FC) was a second home for us. It wasn't just about the game - it was about connection, language, culture and belonging. That environment shaped me, not only as a player but as a person, and set me on the path to becoming a Socceroos player, and now Head Coach.

It's why I strongly believe football remains one of the most powerful vehicles we have to unite communities and celebrate what Australia truly represents.

Tony Popovic

Head Coach – CommBank Socceroos

THE WORLD GAME IN AUSTRALIA

1880: Kicking off an Australian story

Football's global reach is unparalleled. Our game is the most popular sport on every continent, with 240 million regular players and over 5 billion fans worldwide – more than half of the world's population. Representing 211 countries, FIFA has more members than the United Nations.

As one of the most multicultural countries in the world, the world game is also Australia's game. Our country's rich history of immigration and multiculturalism is inseparable from the story of Australian football. The first association football matches were played across Australia from 1880, spurred by a new wave of British migrants who brought with them knowledge of the Football Association's rules and a passion for the round-ball game.

For many migrants to Australia throughout the twentieth century, football represented a unique source of community and a regular platform to celebrate their heritage. Migrant communities across the country established clubs that became social and cultural hubs just as much as they were sporting institutions.

Football provided communities and opportunities for new Australians, and in turn these new Australians transformed the sport. They were players like Tiko Jelisavčić (top scorer of the inaugural 1962 Australia Cup) and Gundega Zarins (a member of the pioneering First Matildas who competed at the 1975 AFC Women's Championship), coaches like Rale Rasic (the first manager to lead the CommBank Socceroos at a World Cup in 1974), and administrators



The winning Victorian team at the 1952 Interstate Football Carnival reflected the rich multicultural character of post-war Australian football (Soccer News, 14 June 1952, via Football Victoria).

like Frank Lowy (who helped found Australia's first national league in any sport, the National Soccer League, in 1974 – before returning to lead Australian football decades later).

The influence of these pioneers shapes Australian football to this day, from our national teams to the grassroots. The stories of our CommBank Socceroos and CommBank Matildas mirror the story of Australia – from early national teams dominated by players with European backgrounds to our recent World Cup squads reflecting a truly global heritage.





Ange Postecoglou celebrates the CommBank Socceroos' victory following the 2015 AFC Asian Cup™ final (Brendon Thorne/Getty Images).

ANGE'S STORY

"Greek migrants like ourselves, we came to Australia pretty much just as a family with no support network or family here and for my parents, it was about the challenge of trying to understand how to live in this new country. The one thing my father found was South Melbourne FC. He loved football... and he found a club where there were a community of people who were going through similar experiences to what we were and it was an environment that was a real comfort to us."¹



Ange Postecoglou's coaching journey started at South Melbourne, the club that first welcomed his family – and tens of thousands of other Greek migrant families – to Australia (Tony Feder/ALLSPORT)

MANY JOURNEYS

The CommBank Socceroos and the CommBank Matildas represent the very best of multicultural Australia on the world's biggest sporting stages. Our national team squads for the FIFA World Cup 2026™ and the FIFA Women's World Cup 2023™ were among the most diverse at each tournament.

The CommBank Matildas squad for the FIFA Women's World Cup 2023™



ONE JERSEY

More than 25 cultural backgrounds were represented in our national team squads at the FIFA World Cup 2026™ and FIFA Women's World Cup 2023™.



The CommBank Socceroos squad for the FIFA World Cup 2026™



At the FIFA World Cup 2026™, the CommBank Socceroos were led by a new generation of stars that reflect the changing face of modern Australia.

As ever, Australia's men's national team was one of the most diverse squads at the world's biggest sporting event. 6 members of the 26-man squad were of African descent, including Nestory Irankunda (born in a Tanzanian refugee camp to Burundian parents) and childhood friend Mo Toure (born in a Guinean refugee camp to Liberian parents). Ahead of the tournament, the squad released a powerful video celebrating their heritage and diversity.

During the tournament, the CommBank Socceroos captured Australia's imagination, with a brave, diverse, youthful side taking on the world's best and reaching the knockout phase. During the tournament:

- **16 World Cup debutants** featured for the CommBank Socceroos, representing a diverse range of cultural backgrounds.
- Over **40,000 Australians attended matches** in Canada and the United States.
- CommBank Socceroos matches broadcast on SBS had a **total television reach of more than 17 million people**, including hundreds of thousands of Australians coming together to watch games across live sites, pubs, clubs, and schools around the country.



Millions of Australians came together to watch the CommBank Socceroos' run at the FIFA World Cup 2026, including tens of thousands attending fan sites around the country.

“The Socceroos aren’t just a team, we are a reflection of modern Australia. No matter where you come from, football is for everyone.”

– JACKSON IRVINE

SHAPING MODERN AUSTRALIA

Multicultural communities sit at the heart of everyday football, shaping how the game is played, supported and celebrated across the country. With nearly 2 million participants playing nationwide at thousands of clubs competing year-round, Australian communities come together to play football every day of the year in every part of the country. Football is a unique platform for uniting Australians regardless of culture, faith, or origin. Beyond football's everyday engagement with these communities, we connect through dedicated avenues that span the entire pathway – from grassroots participation to the professional stage.



MORE THAN 215,000 GRASSROOTS FOOTBALLERS NATIONWIDE WERE BORN IN ANOTHER COUNTRY, REPRESENTING OVER 220 DISTINCT CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS

Our multicultural community programs

As Australia's most-played sport, youth participation in football is a central component of how we engage with multicultural communities. Since 2019, with the support of the Australian Government, Football Australia and our Member Federations have run partnership-based national community programs focused on multicultural and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities. These programs give thousands of young people from diverse backgrounds the chance to play, learn, and grow through football – in a welcoming, safe, and accessible environment. In the past two years alone, these programs have engaged with nearly 50,000 people in CALD communities across the country.

These programs are run with the support of the Australian Government and in partnership with our Member Federations in each state and territory, alongside settlement agencies, community leaders, schools and multicultural organisations. This partnership approach ensures that our programs reflect the needs and aspirations of local communities.

- **The MiniRoos Settlement Program (MSP) (ages 4–12)** provides children from CALD backgrounds with a positive introduction to football, developing fundamental skills like dribbling, passing, teamwork, while encouraging participation in local clubs after completion. Each program runs for up to 12 weeks in a given location, with fun 1-hour sessions once a week. More than just football, it's about making friends and feeling part of the community.
- **The Multicultural Youth Program (MYP) (ages 13–20)**, introduced in 2023, builds on this foundation and continues engagement with weekly football sessions while also embedding leadership and life skills through coaching and refereeing courses and experience providing pathways into paid work. It's a chance to stay involved in football and open doors for the future.
- **The Multicultural Coach Program** develops coaches from multicultural communities, establishing a pathway to employment for participants in the player programs and creating community role models. The program includes delivery of entry-level coaching courses, mentoring and cultural awareness training.



- The **Multicultural Referee Program** offers pathways into refereeing for multicultural communities, building leadership, confidence and employable skills. The program delivers beginner referee courses, mentoring, and supervised match appointments linked to local competitions for practical experience.
- The **Multicultural Club Changer Module** incorporates toolkits for clubs to welcome multicultural families as part of Football Australia's club development program, and includes anti-racism modules to address barriers to inclusion.
- **Multicultural Celebrations of Football and Gala Days** connecting communities with the structured football ecosystem, including seminars, club engagement, talent pathways and referee and coaching opportunities.

REGIONAL DELIVERY OF OUR MULTICULTURAL PROGRAMS

The footprint of our programs continues to grow nationwide. Football Queensland has recently expanded the Multicultural Settlement Program and Multicultural Youth Program beyond South East Queensland, with delivery and community partnerships now established in regional centres including Toowoomba, Bundaberg, Townsville and Cairns.

A key focus is building local capacity rather than relying solely on Football Queensland staff. Football Queensland works with trusted settlement services, schools and multicultural organisations to identify local facilitators – ideally people with lived experience and existing connections to their communities – and create pathways for them into paid football delivery, coaching and refereeing. This approach allows football to be used as an accessible tool for connection and settlement while simultaneously developing a local workforce that can support sustainable football participation in regional communities.

OUR APPROACH: Building cultural understanding and stronger communities through football



Inclusive	• Programs are free of charge • Focus on fun, accessible, positive activities • We work with new migrants, refugees, and CALD communities in areas of socioeconomic disadvantage • Anti-discrimination policies and club development modules on combatting racism foster safe and welcoming environments
Community-driven	• Led by our Member Federations to ensure programs are tailored to local needs and pathways • Grounded in partnerships with settlement agencies, community leaders, schools and multicultural organisations • Delivered by coaches, facilitators and youth workers recruited from target communities • Integrated with community-driven events around our programs and key dates in cultural calendars
Holistic	• Fostering life skills – not just football skills, building values, resilience, communication, teamwork and celebrating diversity. • Training for coaches to create safe and inclusive environments including mentorship • Support for families through increased community engagement and networks
Enduring	• Fostering long-term belonging by providing lasting networks, resources and skills • Connecting participants with local community clubs for transition into the broader football ecosystem • Supporting clubs to provide an inclusive and welcoming environment for participants

RAMADAN'S STORY

Ramadan came to Australia from Palestine in January 2024 with a passion for sport and a desire to build a future in football. Within a few months, he had connected with Football Victoria through its multicultural and schools programs, where he commenced work as a coach, delivering programs led by both Football Victoria and Football Australia. Building on his practical experiences leading school, community, and participation programs, Ramadan has also advanced through formal education pathways, completing the MiniRoos Coaching Course and earning his Football Australia C Licence.

Ramadan's confidence, leadership, and English language skills have grown throughout this experience, as he has progressed from assisting sessions to independently leading them. In turn, he has inspired young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to see how football offers pathways and community connection beyond just playing.



“RAMADAN’S CONFIDENCE, LEADERSHIP, AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS HAVE GROWN THROUGHOUT THIS EXPERIENCE, AS HE HAS PROGRESSED FROM ASSISTING SESSIONS TO INDEPENDENTLY LEADING THEM.”

OUR IMPACT



These programs have delivered broad national impact in CALD communities. Since April 2024, we have:

- Hosted more than **7,500 playing participants** in the program representing more than **85 different nationalities** and **30 different language groups**
- Established **over 300 programs** in all parts of the country, from inner Sydney to Toowoomba
- Created touchpoints with more than **46,000 people in CALD communities** through program sessions, associated events, and match-day attendance by family and friends.

The programs deliver tangible benefits for participants, their families, and their communities:

- Participants and their networks build a sense of belonging and connection within their communities through football.
- Community members develop their leadership skills and mentor those around them: since April 2024, we have recruited and upskilled more than **608 community champions** to support community football as volunteers, coaches, referees or youth workers.
- Participants transition into organised club football, establishing them in their communities beyond the life of the program.
- Families and communities are connected through their children's participation in the programs.

#FootballUnites



In 2025, Football Australia launched #FootballUnites, a national video storytelling initiative designed to demonstrate football's unique ability to bring Australians together across lines of culture, faith, and language. By elevating the experiences of migrants who found identity, community and opportunity through their local clubs, our campaign showcases the power of football in uniting Australians at a time where strengthening social cohesion is a national priority.



KAMAL AND FRED'S STORY

Kamal Ibrahim and Fred Dimitriou's story shows how football transforms lives across generations and migrant experiences. When Kamal fled Ethiopia and arrived in Australia, it was Fred – the son of Greek immigrants and a junior coach at Port Melbourne – who noticed him on the sidelines of a football match. Fred helped Kamal join the club and mentored him on a football journey that saw him represent Australia at youth level and play in the A-League. Now retired, Kamal dedicates himself to community football programs, helping underprivileged young people find the same sense of belonging and opportunity that shaped his own life.

"I NOW RUN THE CHARITY ONE BALL, HELPING THOUSANDS OF UNDERPRIVILEGED KIDS THROUGH FOOTBALL... FRED WAS A FATHER TO ME, AND NOW I'M A FATHER TO THEM."



ZYRA'S STORY

"Once I got to know my teammates and become closer to the football community, my social battery began to charge up. They brought out a happy, goofy side of me – now I laugh and talk a lot."

When Zyra joined Logan Lightning FC aged 13, she was something of an outsider. Football has given Zyra a community – providing her with friendships and support even after she tore her ACL and successfully worked through her recovery. She's one of many women and girls at the club who connected with football following the FIFA Women's World Cup 2023™ – at Logan Lightning, female participation has doubled since 2023.



JAMYSHIA'S STORY

"I'm so grateful for being a part of Balga Soccer Club. I'm a different person. I'm happier, I'm confident with speaking with other people from different cultures, and I'm giving back to my teammates."

Jamyshia is a proud Noongar footballer who has been part of Balga Soccer Club for more than two years, benefiting from the club's fee free football program. The initiative helps remove financial barriers to participation, enabling Jamyshia and other young people to experience the opportunities and connections that football provides. Through her involvement with the club, Jamyshia has grown in confidence, developed a strong sense of belonging, and now enjoys supporting and encouraging her teammates both on and off the field.



MI SUK PARK'S STORY

"It was a big step for me to move to Australia and continue my career. I was a bit lost at first – but I'm so glad I made the decision."

Mi Suk Park was a successful assistant referee in Korea, but moving to Australia was daunting. She progressed through local leagues in Queensland to the A-League Women and A-League Men, and was later selected to officiate at the FIFA Women's World Cup™ and the Olympics. She is now a Referee Support Officer for Football Queensland, supporting the next generation of referees.



KAYLA'S STORY

"When we couldn't form a girls' team, I didn't want to give up soccer – so I decided to play with the boys."

Kayla wouldn't be deterred when Lansvale United couldn't form a girls' team – she found a way to play regardless. Lansvale United is a hub for Sydney's Vietnamese community, and Kayla's mum Tiffany, a refugee who came to Australia aged two, serves on the club committee in addition to being a proud supporter on the sidelines.

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

With a leading role in grassroots football in their states and territories, our Member Federations are key partners for government and communities in supporting multicultural Australia. In addition to facilitating our MiniRoos Settlement Program and Multicultural Youth Program, the Member Federations deliver targeted programs of their own in partnership with multicultural communities.

FOOTBALL SOUTH AUSTRALIA'S EMPOWERING AFRICAN YOUTH INITIATIVE

The African Youth Football Program is an early intervention initiative led by Football South Australia that supports secondary students of African heritage through structured, culturally responsive football programs. The program is supported by the South Australian Government and delivered in partnership with schools. Weekly sessions combine targeted well-being workshops with structured football activities. Through football, the program supports the development of positive behaviour, school engagement, and confidence, while creating clear pathways into club football and sustained participation.

The program has had a remarkably positive impact for participants over the course of the school year, from Terms 1 to 4:²

- Behavioural reports decreased by 32%, reflecting improved student behaviour.
- Average daily student attendance rose by 5%, and the number of individual skipped lessons dropped by 54%.
- The number of student suspensions for misconduct declined by 58%.





ROSELANDS FC, NSW

Roselands FC in Narwee, in Sydney's south, has a strong history of running programs for multicultural communities and recently arrived migrants. In August 2026, they were named Football NSW's Club Changer Club of the Month, recognising their successful Multicultural Program. The program provided participants from a wide range of cultural backgrounds with the chance to come together through football and engage with their community. The 8-week program was capped off with a BBQ celebrating the success of the initiative while introducing families to the wider opportunities available through football.

MACCABI CAULFIELD, VICTORIA

In 2025, the *United in Play* gala brought together more than 30 junior teams from Melbourne's Jewish, Muslim, South Asian, African and First Nations communities through social matches, skills clinics, and cultural celebrations. Children formed friendships between matches, families shared meals, and cultural symbols including kippahs, hijabs, and football jerseys came together seamlessly in a demonstration of unity.

At a time of concern regarding racism, antisemitism and social fragmentation in Australia, this event – one of many – was a pertinent and powerful reminder of how grassroots football brings Australians together. The program was supported by Sport and Recreation Victoria in partnership with Football Victoria, Maccabi Caulfield FC, Melbourne Victory, Stand Up, and the Reagan Milstein Foundation.





MAYADA'S WESTERN AUSTRALIAN STORY

“Football helped me feel closer to my brother. Now I want to help others, to be the coach that Salih never had the chance to be.”

Mayada is a refugee from Northern Syria whose younger brother, a lover of football, passed away from cancer. Mayada honours him by helping others like her find joy, strength and belonging through football as a coach for the Football Futures Foundation, the inclusion partner of Football West. Her story resonates with the refugee and migrant girls she coaches, who see her as someone who understands their journey, their challenges, and their hopes. Through football, Mayada helps these girls build friendships, find connection, and embrace their abilities and opportunities.



Q-LEAGUE AND Q-LEAGUE SCHOOLS, QUEENSLAND

Football Queensland's Q-League and Q-League Schools competitions provide structured football programs for multicultural communities while creating pathways into the broader football ecosystem. In 2026, the Q-League includes 17 teams representing 17 different cultures, offering regular, organised competition in a culturally welcoming environment. This initiative ensures that multicultural players and community leaders can access competitive football while facilitating opportunities to transition into club football, coaching, refereeing and volunteering.

Q-League Schools extends this approach into some of South East Queensland's most diverse schools, addressing barriers such as cost, transport and cultural accessibility that can prevent young people from participating in club football. Through Junior and Senior Boys and Girls competitions, students gain access to regular structured football in a trusted school environment while being connected to longer-term opportunities in the game.

"Q-League Schools doesn't just provide matches – it provides purpose, identity, and belonging for young people from diverse backgrounds who may otherwise miss out, and it creates memories and life skills that last far beyond their school years."

MORGAN ROBERTS,

Head of Football at Mabel Park State High School, Logan

Football Unites Politics

The multicultural story of football extends into every part of Australian life, including at Australian Parliament House in Canberra and in state and territory parliaments around the country. The regular Wednesday morning football match at Senate Oval, Canberra reflects this diversity, bringing together political leaders from a range of cultural backgrounds and political perspectives, united by a shared love of the game.





Football has a unique ability to bring people together. In communities like mine in Reid, people come from every corner of the world, but on a football pitch those differences can quickly disappear. The game gives people a shared language, a sense of belonging and a way to build friendships across cultures and generations.

I've seen that first hand with the Newington Gunners, a wonderful local football club in my electorate. The Gunners reflect the community around them: families from many different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, brought together by their children's love of football. I first became closely involved with the club after receiving a handwritten letter from 10-year-old Marcus Zhang, who told me how much he loved playing for the Gunners but how difficult it was for the club to operate without a permanent home ground. When I later joined Marcus and his teammates at a game, what stood out was not just their passion for football, but the sense of community around the club — parents, players and volunteers from all sorts of backgrounds sharing the sidelines and supporting one another.

That is what football can do at its best. Local clubs create places where new friendships are formed, cultures mix naturally and people feel part of something bigger than themselves. As Chair of the Parliamentary Friends of Football, I'm proud to champion a game that reflects modern Australia: diverse, welcoming and united.

SALLY SITOU MP,

Member for Reid, Co-Chair of the Parliamentary Friends of Football



I'm a proud third generation Australian, since my grandparents migrated from Italy and settled on a farm in Victoria's Yarra Valley region.

From the Italian and Dutch migrants in the 1950s to 60s, to more recent times amongst the growing Burmese and Chin communities, football has been an important part of my community's migrant story.

Looking back at my childhood, sport was my refuge, where I could feel secure and find myself. I do not know where I would be today if not for the safe place I found through sport, including at the Mooroolbark Soccer Club.

In many of my local communities, our sporting clubs are the heart of the town, providing a safe place and refuge for young men and women.

AARON VIOLI MP,

Member for Casey, Co-Chair of the Parliamentary Friends of Football

BRINGING THE BEST OF WORLD FOOTBALL TO AUSTRALIA



Korea Republic fans at the 2015 AFC Asian Cup™ (Mark Kolbe/Getty Images)

Beyond the grassroots, the rise of our national teams in the 21st century has coincided with the growth of our domestic leagues and the hosting of several major international tournaments. These developments have brought the world's best footballers to Australia, exposing our communities to football stars from across the globe.



Keisuke Honda's time in the A-League gave Japanese Australians the chance to watch one of their country's greatest stars (Robert Prezioso/Getty Images)

Domestically, A-League Men is Australia's most diverse national league: since its foundation in 2005, players from more than 90 countries – from Algeria to Wales – have played in the top domestic league.

The A-Leagues have also welcomed iconic international stars and provided communities with the chance to engage with heroes from their countries of heritage, including Juan Mata and David Villa (Spain), Nani (Portugal), Alessandro Del Piero (Italy), Shinji Ono and Keisuke Honda (Japan), Sabrita 'Samba' Bhandari (Nepal), and Juninho, Romario and Douglas Costa (Brazil).

Beyond the world-renowned stars, the A-League and its clubs also host and participate in diversity and inclusion programs reaching over 48,000 annually, and regularly engage with multi-cultural communities through long-term embedded programs, initiatives and celebrations, including some highlights below:



Melbourne Victory: The club's U-Nite Multicultural Round started in 2010 to celebrate cultural diversity and the role football plays in uniting Melbourne's multicultural communities. The celebration round regularly

features special events such as on-pitch Australian citizenship ceremonies, multicultural villages, and traditional performances, with the 2026 celebration run in collaboration with the Victorian Multicultural Commission at the beginning of Victoria's 2026 Cultural Diversity Week.



Melbourne Victory hosts its Citizenship Ceremony annually on Australia Day, inviting the newest Australians on the pitch on walkout (Jonathan Di Maggio/Getty Images)



Western Sydney Wanderers: Based in Western Sydney, one of the most culturally and linguistically diverse regions in Australia, the club run key multicultural programs through their foundation including hosting the NSW African Cup, and running South Sudanese and First Nations Football Programs.



The First Nations and Maori cultures were showcased at half-time of Western Sydney Wanderers' clash with Wellington as part of the club's Multicultural Round (Jeremy Ng/Getty Images)



Japanese star Shinji Ono and Italian legend Alessandro Del Piero met in one of the A-League's biggest fixtures, the Sydney Derby (Brendon Thorne/Getty Images)



Melbourne City: Through the 'City in the Community' program, the club hosts an annual Refugee Week Tournament in Dandenong, in Melbourne east. The tournament uses football to unite communities, celebrate cultural diversity, and create social inclusion and positive pathways for newly arrived Australians and people from refugee backgrounds.



Nepali fans were introduced to the A-League for the first time with the arrival of Nepalese female football legend, Sabitra 'Samba' Bhandari (Ayush Kumar/Getty Images)

League-wide Unite Round (November 2024): more than 600 fans, representing 40 countries, took part in a 'multicultural march' at Allianz Stadium ahead of the match to honour the cultural diversity of the world game.

AFC WOMEN'S ASIAN CUP 2026™

The AFC Women's Asian Cup™ in March 2026 was an extraordinary celebration of Australia's communities with Asian heritage. Hosting Asia's most prestigious women's football tournament in Sydney, Perth and the Gold Coast was a landmark moment for Australian football, led by an independent Local Organising Committee.



The CommBank Matildas were joined at the AFC Women's Asian Cup™ 2026 by South Korea, Iran, Philippines, North Korea, China, Bangladesh, Uzbekistan, Japan, Vietnam, India and Chinese Taipei





AFC WOMEN'S ASIAN CUP AUSTRALIA 2026™



Engaging Australia's Asian communities was an integral part of the tournament's success. In November 2025, the AFC Women's Asian Cup 2026™ launched the Community Champions program, bringing together more than 200 community leaders to showcase the excitement, culture and pride of the participating nations. The Community Champions included figures from football clubs and community associations to business leaders, consular officials and community media, all working to strengthen multicultural engagement and celebrate their communities throughout the tournament.

The tournament was the most successful AFC Women's Asian Cup™ in history, demonstrating the power of women's football and the strength of football's engagement with multicultural Australia. Key records include:

- More than 350,000 fans attending matches, far surpassing the tournament record of 60,000 set in 2010 in China.
- The highest overall attendance in tournament history, with nearly 75,000 fans attending the final between the CommBank Matildas and Japan.
- The highest attendance in tournament history for a match featuring two non-host nations, with 17,000 fans attending the semi-final between the Korea Republic and Japan.



**AUSTRALIAN
CHAMPIONSHIP**



AUSTRALIA CUP AND AUSTRALIAN CHAMPIONSHIP

Football Australia's Australia Cup and Australian Championship competitions are an integral element of how we engage with multicultural Australia today. These competitions reconnect many of the multicultural community clubs that pioneered football in Australia with the top level of the game, providing them with a national platform to celebrate the stories of their communities.



Fans at South Melbourne's opening match of the Australian Championship in 2025.

The modern Australia Cup was launched in 2014, building on the history of Australia's original national football cup which ran throughout the 1960s. Each year, more than 700 community clubs from every state and territory in Australia have the chance to compete with top-level A-Leagues clubs.

In 2025, we launched the Australian Championship, elevating several historic multicultural clubs through the first national second tier competition from any football code in Australia. The league includes eight foundation

clubs with rich histories and deep intergenerational ties as pillars of Australia's Italian, Greek, Croatian and Macedonian communities. Football Australia's 'History Reimagined' campaign highlighted the heritage of these competing clubs, and the way in which they continue to unite their communities today.

The Australian Championship's 8 foundation clubs proudly represent multicultural communities in addition to new audiences.



Avondale FC, Marconi Stallions, Wests APIA, Bayswater City



Preston Lions, Broadmeadow Magic



South Melbourne, Sydney Olympic, Heidelberg United



Sydney United 58, Canberra Croatia



WELCOMING NEW AUSTRALIANS – AFGHAN WOMEN UNITED

When the Taliban returned to power in Afghanistan in 2021, female footballers fled to protect their safety and their freedom to play. Many found a new home in Australia. With the support of the Australian football community, most notably Melbourne Victory FC, they formed the Afghan Women's Team and entered Victoria's State League in 2022. Football gave them a way to compete, build a community and keep their Afghan identity visible in their new country. It is a powerful example of multicultural Australia at its best: offering people a place to belong without asking them to leave their heritage behind.



In 2025, FIFA established Afghan Women United for players living in exile, with its first talent-identification camp held in Sydney that July. When the team played its first international friendly, against Chad in Morocco in October 2025; 13 of the 23 players were based in Australia. In April 2026, the FIFA Council changed its rules to create a path for Afghan women to represent their country in official international matches. These players have turned the chance to rebuild their lives in Australia into a platform for Afghan women and girls to be seen on the world stage.



BUILDING ON OUR SUCCESS

Football is a multicultural sport, and Football Australia remains steadfast in its commitment to supporting and celebrating Australia’s diverse communities. As we look ahead, we will continue to engage, support, and celebrate multicultural Australia at every level of the game, from grassroots participation to the professional stage.

LEADERSHIP

Strong and inclusive leadership is essential to ensuring football continues to reflect the communities it serves. We will support and empower the next generation of diverse leaders across the game, from the boardroom to the dressing room, building on football’s long tradition of creating pathways for people from all backgrounds to contribute and succeed. This includes:

- Embedding inclusion principles through the Club Changer club development program to support welcoming and culturally aware football environments.
- Ongoing coordination of inclusion initiatives across our Member Federations.
- Celebrate and elevate the multicultural clubs that have shaped Australian football through ongoing delivery of the Australian Championship and Australia Cup.

- Supporting ongoing multicultural programs led by our Member Federations, creating opportunities for players, coaches, referees, administrators and families through football.
- Incorporating a dedicated Multicultural Pillar within our National Participation Plan, developed in consultation with key stakeholders.

PARTNERSHIP

Football’s ability to strengthen communities is amplified when we work together. We will continue to identify and pursue new partnerships with governments, schools, settlement services, multicultural organisations and community leaders to expand opportunities for participation, leadership and connection through football.

By building on these partnerships, Football Australia will continue to use the power of the game to celebrate multiculturalism, support social cohesion and create meaningful opportunities for people from every background.

PARTICIPATION

Participation remains the foundation of football’s connection with multicultural Australia, and we will continue to invest in multicultural participation by:



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Endnotes

- 1 <https://greekherald.com.au/community/1-people-community/interviews/lucky-to-grow-up-in-australia-but-in-greece-i-also-feel-at-home-ange-postecoglou/>
- 2 FSA data