

Australian immigration and migrant assimilation  
1945 to 1960

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## Abstract

In 1947 Australia embarked on a large scale immigration program that resulted in the settlement of over 1 million migrants over the next 15 years. The grandiose nature of this program and its ideological underpinnings of migrant assimilation dominate this period of Australian immigration history. The orthodox perception of this often referred to but surprisingly under-researched policy is that it was a dogmatic drive for migrant assimilation into the existing Australian culture. How, then, does the nation come to accept these immigrants and transform itself into a celebrated multicultural state in the space of the next 30 years?

This thesis contends that Australia's postwar policy of migrant assimilation is more nuanced than this perception allows. If we accept that the ostensibly uncompromising rhetoric of assimilation defined the migrant experience, this will lead to a skewed understanding of what was actually transpiring at this crucial transitional moment in Australia's immigration history.

This thesis argues that the implications of postwar migrant assimilation policy cannot be understood without examining government and grass roots initiatives towards migrant settlement. By examining both government and community responses to the policy of assimilation, at the national and local level and through a German migrant case study, this thesis reveals the existence of a subtle but important social and administrative dialogue on the settlement needs of migrants.

This thesis demonstrates that regardless of its initial conception or accompanying rhetoric, postwar assimilation fostered a growing national dialogue and exchange of information on the migrant situation. Coupled with the tireless work of many individual public servants, community bodies and Australian citizens, this dialogue established channels of communication and fostered reciprocal relationships that enhanced the provision of settlement services for migrants. This dialogue also sanctioned the negotiation, interpretation and implementation of policy at both the national and grass roots levels. The goals of this reciprocal process were more akin to achieving migrant 'settlement' rather than 'assimilationist' outcomes. Ultimately this thesis demonstrates that the relationships and processes engendered by the policy of assimilation inform our understanding of the period as the progenitor of Australian multiculturalism.

## Thesis Declaration

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

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**Kristy Kokegei**  
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**ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>ACC</b>	Australian Citizenship Convention
<b>ANU</b>	Australian National University
<b>AP</b>	Assisted Passage
<b>CIAC</b>	Commonwealth Immigration Advisory Council
<b>CMO</b>	Commonwealth Migration Officer
<b>DP</b>	Displaced Person
<b>ELCA</b>	Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia
<b>FF</b>	Full Fare paying migrant visa
<b>GAPS</b>	German Assisted Passage Scheme
<b>GNC</b>	Good Neighbour Council
<b>GNM</b>	Good Neighbour Movement
<b>ICEM</b>	Inter-Governmental Committee for European Migration
<b>IRO</b>	International Refugee Organisation
<b>LAA</b>	Lutheran Archives of Australia
<b>LWF</b>	Lutheran World Federation
<b>LWFSS</b>	Lutheran World Federation Sponsorship Scheme
<b>MV</b>	Migrant Visa
<b>NLA</b>	National Library of Australia
<b>NSL</b>	New Settlers League
<b>NSW</b>	New South Wales
<b>NAA</b>	National Archives of Australia
<b>SA</b>	South Australia
<b>SAR</b>	South Australian Railways
<b>SLSA</b>	State Library of South Australia
<b>SP</b>	Special Projects [migrant]
<b>TAS</b>	Tasmania

<b>UELCA</b>	United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia
<b>VIC</b>	Victoria
<b>YMCA</b>	Young Men's Christian Association
<b>YWCA</b>	Young Women's Christian Association