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Fostering Equity in and through Sport: A Content Analysis of Sport and Physical Activity Policies for Migrants in Australia

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Fostering Equity in and through Sport: A Content Analysis of Physical Activity and Sports Policies for Migrants in Australia

ABSTRACT

Issue addressed

Physical activity (PA) and sport are mechanisms that promote health and social belonging, yet evidence of policies promoting sports participation and inclusion for Australia's growing migrant population is limited. This study examined how Australian federal, Victorian state, and local government (LG) policies address migrant inclusion and equitable sports participation, with a secondary focus on Asian Indians, Australia's largest Asian ethnic group.

Methods

Twenty public-facing policy documents drawn between 2014 and 2024 were systematically selected and thematically analysed (federal: $n=10$, state: $n=2$, LGs: $n=8$) using content analysis with ten predefined categories drawn from migrant-contextual PA domains and planning aspects.

Results

Fifteen documents referenced migrant-specific keywords. Key categories included social and cultural contexts, physical environment, and target groups. Sociocultural framing in national and LG documents highlighted sport's role in migrant integration. Victorian LGs adapted the physical environment to accommodate informal and culturally specific sports (e.g., kabaddi), fee-free options, and multisport facilities. Few national sport-sector documents distinctly target migrants. Immigration-sector documents identified new arrivals, highlighted cross-government partnerships that integrated sport within workplace initiatives, and adopted a migrant-focused evaluation framework. Most documents lacked actionable migrant-focused initiatives and details on budget, timeframes, or legal compliance.

Conclusion

Migrant inclusion is gaining attention in national sport policy initiatives but is insufficiently addressed in state-level documents. Intersectional approaches, targeted planning, collaboration between sport, immigration, and health sectors, and increased political advocacy could advance migrant equity.

So what?

Migrant-targeted strategies in policy documentation are a responsive approach to integration and narrowing existing policy gaps that widen inequities within Australia's sporting landscape.

1 Introduction

Physical inactivity is a global health pandemic contributing to the growing economic burden of non-communicable diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, and stroke ¹. In 2018, physical inactivity in Australia accounted for 2.5% of the total disease burden, contributing to 20% of the burden from type 2 diabetes and 16% from coronary heart disease ². The Australian National Health Survey 2022 found 78% of Australian adults aged 18 to 64 years are insufficiently active, with women more likely to be inactive than men (80% vs 75%) ². Promoting physical activity among Australian adults is crucial.

Migration, a key contributor to global health equity ³, can challenge physical activity engagement. Holdsworth et al⁴ identified migration within wider social and cultural contexts, health communication, the physical environment, and social and material resources as influences on physical activity behaviour among ethnic minorities adapting to new host countries. In Australia, between 2013 and 2023, the proportion of migrants increased from 27.7% to 30.7%, with the Asian Indian population nearly doubling from 1.6% to 3.2%, now Australia's largest ethnic and Asian-born migrant group ⁵. Such demographic shifts underscore the need for policies that reflect the unique health needs and sociocultural experiences of migrants.

Participation in sports and physical activity not only addresses health-related lifestyle challenges but also facilitates social integration and promotes healthier lifestyle practices^{6,7}. However, evidence shows that Indian and other South Asian migrants have lower levels of physical activity compared to the broader Australian and non-immigrant population⁸, with wider determinants such as social connections, cultural practices, and physical environments influencing their access to participate in sport and physical activity^{9,10}. For Indian migrants at higher risk for non-communicable diseases¹¹, enhancing physical activity levels is essential to meet Australia's physical activity recommendations and improve health outcomes¹². Strengthening policy action to promote migrant physical activity is critical.

A review of physical activity policy in Australia highlighted inconsistencies in policy development, limited policy duration, weak implementation mechanisms, and a lack of systematic evaluation¹³, suggesting that policy intent does not necessarily translate into effective or sustained action. Such reviews largely focused on national policy frameworks, and, while not explicitly focused on migration, leave gaps in articulating how Australia's rising migrant populations are included within sport and physical activity policy across government levels. In Europe, a content analysis of physical activity policy documents examined aspects such as sectors and institutions, target groups, legal status, goals, budget, evaluation, timeframe and implementation to highlight areas for improving policy planning and effectiveness¹⁴. To our knowledge, no empirical work to date has analysed policy content to inform policy recommendations for migrants in Australia.

Therefore, the primary aim of this study is to examine how sport and physical activity documents at the federal, state (Victoria), and local government (LG) levels prioritise the inclusion of migrants and address strategies to promote equitable access and opportunities for their participation in sport in Australia. A secondary aim focused on the inclusion of Asian Indians, Australia's largest Asian ethnic group.

This paper adopts the Australian Government's broader definition of "sport" to include both structured and informal physical activities, such as walking or cycling¹⁵. A broader

definition may better support diverse cultural and recreational preferences, suited to migrants in fostering social connections, improving wellbeing, and promoting fitness.

2 Methods

2.1 Definitions

This qualitative study describes and interprets official written documents, specifically strategies, action plans, and reports published by Australian federal, Victorian state, and LG entities. The following definitions were adapted from a previous study on sports policies in Europe ¹⁶. *Policy* was defined as a formal written document endorsed by a government body that outlined goals, priorities, and directions for attaining those goals. An *action plan* referred to a document prepared to support a policy and strategic directions, detailing responsibilities, timelines, resources, and mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation ¹⁶. A *strategy* referred to the long-term plan of action designed to achieve the goal of promoting sport; if a policy and a related action plan existed, they were unified as one strategy ¹⁶. *Reports* at the federal level included research findings, relevant trends, and recommendations on issues such as integration, employment, and settlement outcomes for migrants, detailing specific actions implemented to support these recommendations. LG reports tracked progress and assessed how local initiatives align with broader goals promoting sport and recreation.

Australia's three-tier government system was defined as follows: the federal level referred to documents enacted or implemented by the national government at the *whole population level*, i.e., the Australian Federal Government. The state level referred to documents enacted or implemented across a state by the state government, i.e., the Victorian State Government. The local level referred to documents enacted or implemented by LGs within a state at the local community level, such as the City of Brimbank Council, Greater Melbourne, State of Victoria.

2.2 Theoretical framework: Contextual domains influencing ethnic migrant physical activity participation

Holdsworth et al⁴ identified multiple, interrelated domains of influence on the physical activity behaviour of ethnic migrant populations and included migration experiences as a distinct domain. Other domains included sociocultural settings, health communication, psychosocial contexts, workplace environment, physical environment and opportunity, social and material resources, and political environment. These domains provide a framework for contextual factors mentioned or omitted in the policy documents in this study. A European study applied these domains to show how complex individual, social, and environmental factors influence physical activity in ethnic minority populations, and some relationships can be modified by interventions or policies ¹⁷.

2.3 Reflexivity

The authors [details removed for review] carried expertise in public health, sport, and physical activity, social justice, and health equity. They recognised that achieving equity for migrants in Australian sport and physical activity policies requires exploring migration within diverse contextual experiences. To manage potential bias arising from their professional and cultural backgrounds, the first author used reflexive journaling to examine personal assumptions held as an insider [detail removed to limit author identification], while the second author used peer debriefing to challenge these assumptions and strengthen reflexive rigour. Their collaboration supported analytical consistency, particularly when developing and applying the coding framework.

2.4 Design and approach

This study applied a four-step document analysis methodology ¹⁸ as follows: (1) reading and selecting documents based on inclusion and exclusion criteria, (2) extracting key details such as title, publication year, and document type (3) analysing textual content using a deductive coding framework or category system, and (4) distilling findings

through thematic synthesis of predefined categories, reported in this study as two overarching categories. Steps 3 and 4 specifically applied a rule-guided deductive content analysis approach ¹⁹. This involved using a predefined coding framework to analyse the explicit language in official policy documents, drawing meaning, framing, and thematic patterns regarding migrant inclusion and participation in sport and physical activity. Frequency counts complement reporting these findings. Saturation was achieved when no new information emerged with sufficient replication of coded text passages to substantiate the coding framework ²⁰. Documents were de-identified for reporting findings. Ethical approval was not required, as documents were publicly available and did not require permission from publishers.

2.5 Document selection

Externally facing documents were sourced from public and government websites, such as the state government website and key LGs, online portals via the Google search engine. Inclusion and exclusion criteria ensured a purposeful, diverse selection of documents to address the study's aims ²¹. Initial keyword searches terms combined physical activity and sport with “migrant” or “culturally and linguistically diverse” (CALD). To address the secondary aim, handpicked LG documents were restricted to areas identified with a high concentration of the Indian population in Greater Melbourne ^{22,23}. Searches were initially conducted in November 2023, with a final check performed in October 2024 and were limited to English-language content.

Eligible documents were published versions between 2014 and 2024. Excluded documents comprised information guides, programs, blogs, news articles, and research summaries from non-governmental organisations or independent entities such as national, state peak advocacy, and representative bodies for sport and/or active recreation. Documents on children or older adults were excluded to align with the national physical activity guidelines for adults aged 18 to 64 years. Australia has specific guidelines for those aged between 5 and 17 years and those over 65 years ²⁴. Incomplete drafts and outdated versions were also excluded.

Supplementary File 1 illustrates the document selection process. The initial search found 31 policy documents on sport and physical activity relating to culturally diverse communities and/or migrants in Australia. Thirteen met the inclusion criteria. Seven additional handpicked documents from reference lists ensured a broad representation across government levels, maintaining a focus on Indian populations at the LG level. Older documents replaced more recent published versions between 2014 and 2024.

2.6 Developing the category system (coding framework)

To frame key categories, we drew on the aforementioned contextual domains of influence on physical activity, including migration contexts, social and cultural contexts, physical environment, health and health communication, and workplace environments⁴. Additional categories were adapted to include eight aspects identified in earlier research as important for effective physical activity policy planning¹⁴. These included sectors and institutions, target groups, legal status, goals and targets, timeframes, budgets, evaluation, and implementation. For this study, target groups, goals, evaluation, sectors and institutions were retained to provide additional insights within migrant-related contextual domains. For instance, the target groups category focused on whether and how migrants were prioritised. Categories linked by specific text passages were grouped to form an overarching category reported in **Table 3**, with the system refined throughout the coding process. **Table 1** presents the deductive category system, definitions, rules, and examples guiding the analysis.

2.6.1 Unit of analysis and coding rules

The textual units of analysis explicitly linked migrant or migration-specific keywords in sport. Reading each document helped identify additional keyword derivatives, which were coded in sections and paragraphs containing words such as “overseas” and “birth country” with mentions of regions “India” and other migrant countries.

Text passages from documents related to the sport and physical activity sectors were coded if they explicitly addressed migrants or migration, even when the passage did not directly mention “sport”. Textual units from immigration or settlement sector documents were coded if the texts directly related to sport or physical activity. No attempts were made to discern the recency of migration or to distinguish first-generation migrants from second-generation individuals.

2.7 Data extraction, synthesis, and analysis

Prior to analysis, Author 1 checked that the selected documents were error-free, complete versions and relevant in addressing the aims ²⁵. A Microsoft Excel template was created to record key details, including the title, publication information, government level, document type, and publication year. This process ensured content was drawn from reliable published sources, enhancing the trustworthiness of the research ²⁶.

After reviewing each document in full, Author 1 performed a keyword search using the search functions in PDF and Word documents, targeting terms such as “physical activity,” “exercise,” “sport,” and “recreation” (for non-sporting sectors), and migration-related terms like “overseas,” “India*,” and “migra*” across all documents. Author 1 coded a subset of the documents, generating coding rules for ambiguous text passages to ensure clarity across the selection of texts for each category. Coding rules were documented and referenced throughout the coding process. After coding 30% of the documents, Author 1 revised the categories and coding schemes until the coding guidelines represented sufficient examples to facilitate a smooth coding run-through. Author 2 independently reviewed the initially coded text passages from the same 30% subset of policy documents and provided written feedback. Both authors collaboratively resolved discrepancies before finalising the categories, definitions, and coding rules, resulting in a cohesive a priori coding framework (or category system). Author 1 applied this framework to code the remaining documents. All documents were imported and coded using NVivo 14 for Mac, Version 12 ²⁷. Crosstab queries analysed the frequency and distribution (n%) of codes across categories, drawing insights into their distribution

across government levels. We followed the Standards for Reporting Qualitative Research guidelines²⁸ provided as an **Appendix**.

TABLE 1. Deductive category system, category definitions, coding rules, and general examples are scoped across the documents

Category	Category Definitions	Coding Rules	Anchored Examples
Target Groups	Identified migrant populations.	Subgroups (e.g., refugees, skilled migrants).	'...target groups included middle-aged men, new migrants, and Indigenous Australians'.
Migration Contexts	Examine factors	Code migration settings related to sport/Indian/migrant populations	'The last decade has seen this trend continue with growth in migration to Australia predominantly from the Asia-Pacific region, particularly from India...'
Social and Cultural Contexts	Examine social, cultural factors, consider the role of peer groups, social networks, and supportive structures.	Code barriers and facilitators, specific examples.	'These social, environmental, structural, economic, cultural, biomedical, commercial and digital factors lead to inequity and inequality within society...including the neighbourhood we grew up in'.
Physical Environment and Opportunity	Explore the availability of culturally sensitive facilities; improved accessibility.	Code facilities adapting to the needs of diverse communities	'The hierarchy of facilities will respond to changing and emerging needs of the local community through flexible design'.
Social and Material Resources	Explore online platforms		The Department launched an online interface in October 2019 to facilitate

		bringing the community together and is looking for other opportunities to link humanitarian entrants with the community’.
Workplace Environment	Explore occupational settings and workplace policies that support engagement and integration.	‘Integrated approach to economic and social participation delivers outcomes for young refugees and other vulnerable migrants by improving workplace readiness, providing access to vocational opportunities and creating strong social connections through education and sports engagement’.
Sector Collaboration	and Key partnerships in developing and implementing initiatives.	Collaborative partnerships: government, non-government organisations, [initiative] through an integrated, end-to-end delivery model. [organisation] works with organisations in the broader community to facilitate one-off events...’
Implementation	Assess the clarity of the implementation plan.	What details are considered in ‘... [initiative] designed to improve workplace readiness, provide access to vocational opportunities and create strong social

			connections through education and sports engagement’.
Goals and Priorities	Specified objectives for migrants		‘Priority areas: Inclusion Participation Promote environments that are safe and encourage participation and involvement across diverse cohorts, including ... migrants’.
Evaluation	Evaluation tools/resources	Migrant friendly planning/delivery	‘The Framework provides a high-level structural blueprint for Commonwealth, state, territories and local government to work together to effectively plan and deliver services that support the settlement of migrants and new arrivals’.

Note. This table is informed by the work described by Mayring ¹⁹.

3 Results

3.1 Quantitative description of documents analysed

Table 2 provides the titles and jurisdictions of the twenty included documents. Of these, 15 included migration-specific keywords and were coded against the predefined categories. **Supplementary File 2** reports the frequency of migration-specific keywords showing the greatest overall focus on migration at the federal government level, with “Migra*,” “Oversea*” and “India” appearing most frequently. In contrast, state-level documents primarily focused on sport and recreation and contained few such keywords. LG documents mainly addressed recreation, although half mentioned “Indian” migrants; the overall focus on migration was lower than in federal documents.

TABLE 2. Overview of policy documents included in the content analysis ($n=20$).

Level	Title and Publication Information	Sector
FEDERAL	Sport 2030: National Sport Plan	Sport
GOVERNMENT	Published 2018, Australian Government, Australian Sports Commission	
	Consultation Phase for the Development of the National Sport Plan	Sport, Recreation
	Published 2018, Australian Sports Commission, Urbis Pvt Ltd	
	National Preventive Health Strategy 2021- 2030	Health
	Published 2021, Australian Government, Department of Health	
	Physical Activity and Exercise Guidelines for all Australians. Website (18 to 64 years) Fact sheet & tips; Make your move – Sit less - Be active for life! Guidelines, 18 to 64 years. Brochure	Recreation
	Published 2021, Australian Government, Department of Health and Aged Care	
	The Future of Australian Sport: Second Megatrends Full Report	Sport
	Published 2022, Australian Government, CSIRO	
	National Sports Plan: Public Consultation Paper	Sport
	Published 2023, Australian Government, Department of Health and Aged Care	
	Investing in Refugees: Investing in Australia. The Findings of a Review into Integration, Employment and Settlement Outcomes for Refugees and Humanitarian Entrants in Australia	Immigration and Citizenship
	Published 2019, Australian Government, Commonwealth of Australia	

	Australian Government's Response to Recommendations in the Report: Investing in Refugees, Investing in Australia: The Findings of a Review into Integration, Employment and Settlement Outcomes for Refugees and Humanitarian Entrants in Australia Published 2019, Australian Government, Department of Home Affairs	Immigration and Citizenship
	Australia's High-Performance Sport Strategy - 'Win Well' Published 2022, Australian Government, Australian Sports Commission	Sport
	Sport Horizon: National Sport Strategy 2024 - 2034 Published 2024, Australian Government, Office of Sport	Sport
STATE GOVERNMENT	Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2023 - 2027 Published 2023, Victoria State Government, Department of Health	Health
	Active Victoria 2022-2026 - A Strategic Framework for Sport and Active Recreation in Victoria. Published 2022, Victoria State Government, Department of Jobs, Regions and Precincts	Sport, Recreation
LOCAL GOVERNMENT*	Make Your Move: Greater Dandenong Physical Activity Strategy 2020–2030 Published 2020, Greater Dandenong: Greater Dandenong City Council	Recreation
	Greater Dandenong Physical Activity Strategy 2020-30: Year 3 Implementation Plan (2022-23) * Published 2022, Greater Dandenong: Greater Dandenong City Council	Recreation
	City of Casey Sport and Physical Activity Strategy, 2021-2025 Published (Unknown), City of Casey: Casey City Council	Sport, Recreation
	Active Wyndham	Recreation

Published (Unknown), Wyndham City: Wyndham City Council Wyndham Sports Strategy 2045	Sport
Published 2017, Wyndham City: Wyndham City Council Wyndham 2040 Community Vision - Progress Report 2023 -2024	Recreation
Published 2023/2024, Wyndham City: Wyndham City Council Brimbank Physical Activity Strategy	Recreation
Published (Unknown), City of Brimbank: Brimbank City Council Active Monash: Monash Active Recreation Opportunities Strategy	Recreation
Published 2021, City of Monash: Monash City Council	

Note. * Documents addressing the secondary aim focusing on Indian migrants at the LG level.

3.2 Content analysis

The overarching categories that emerged were 1) Social and cultural inclusivity and equity in sport, reflecting contextual domains of social and cultural contexts, physical environment and opportunity, and workplace environment, and 2) Strategies promoting migrant equity and inclusion, focusing on target groups, goals and priorities, implementation, sector and collaboration, and evaluation. There were overlaps in the workplace environment when developing workplace competencies for migrants with initiatives that mentioned the role of sport in fostering social connections. **Table 3** summarises the frequency distribution of coding references under each overarching category by government levels. **Supplementary File 3** illustrates the prevalence, frequency, and coding references across predefined categories by government levels.

Theme 1: Social and cultural inclusivity and equity in sport

Key categories from the content analysis provide a comprehensive understanding of the contextual domains linked to migrant sport participation. These are reported below.

Migrant demographic shifts and rising cultural diversity: Most documents in the sport and recreation sector recognised Australia's demographic changes driven by migration, but only the federal government and LGs highlighted the recent and rapid rise in the number of Asian migrants, particularly Indian migrants. State government documents lacked such granular information. Three LG documents emphasised a growing culturally diverse population, with a rising proportion of overseas-born residents. For instance, one LG noted, 'the top five countries of birth outside Australia being India, New Zealand, Philippines, England and China. ... The proportion of residents born in India doubled between 2011 and 2016 [LG ID 17, Sport sector]. Another LG highlighted its status as the 'most culturally diverse locality in Australia with over 64% of its population born overseas, and residents from 157 different birthplaces. ... [Birthplaces] included Vietnam, Cambodia, China, India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Afghanistan, New Zealand and Great Britain' [LG ID 13, Recreation sector]. These quotes highlight the significant increase in the number of Asian residents, particularly Indian-born migrants. While LGs

focused on growing cultural diversity, federal government documents expanded on the influx of migrants, including Indians, referencing long-term trends and projections that Australia's population growth would increasingly come from overseas migration, particularly from Asia.

Role of sport: In the context of the rising migrant demographic, the role of sport emerged as a means of fostering integration and social cohesion. Federal government documents framed sport in a broader, societal context, while LG documents focused on accommodating preferences and participation formats to engage new migrants in sporting activities. The following quotes illustrate this view:

‘Sports can bridge the gaps between diverse communities ... sport’s role in introducing newcomers to local communities, assisting people in making friends, establishing social networks, gaining a sense of belonging and staying physically active [as well as] help[ing] young migrants increase their confidence and self-esteem in a new society’. [Federal ID 5, sport sector]

‘The continual growth and development of [LG’s] diverse community brings new sports and new ways to engage newly arrived communities from South and Southeast Asia, Africa, and the Middle East are seeking different sports and changes to existing formats of participation’. [LG 17, sport sector].

Building community connections through sport: Federal government documents emphasised the importance of building migrant social networks, whereas LG documents focus on informal, team-based sports to support the integration of diverse migrant nationalities. The following excerpts illustrate this:

‘On Friday nights, a group of Colombian men play against Chileans. Both groups wear homemade team jerseys. On Sunday afternoons in summer the informal Sydney Nepalese [Name] Soccer Club uses the park to train. Later in the evening, men from Nepal and India play social cricket. These games have histories. Many of the players have gathered weekly for years. In some

cases, informal teams have evolved into official leagues’. [LG ID 13, recreation sector]

‘They build on connections at the shopping mall, in the workplace, by participating in community programs or joining in sporting activities. Some begin by volunteering and assisting in their own communities but, in doing so, they build relationships with the wider society’. [Federal ID 7, immigration sector report]

Physical environment and opportunity: Both LG- and state-level documents mentioned the importance of sports facilities and open spaces in encouraging physical activity and supporting community integration, but they differed in scope, focus, and the specific needs they addressed. LGs took a tailored approach, introducing new formats for traditional sports, such as cricket, to engage the South Asian community with a social focus. Further considerations included fee-free settings, informal social sports, and culturally relevant activities to foster inclusion. Within these informal, no-fee settings, the LG documents recognised the growing popularity of culturally traditional sports: For instance, kabaddi, a traditional Indian sport, is gaining traction. To support these evolving community needs, LG documents emphasised the need for flexible sports facilities that could host multiple sports at the same venue. The following excerpt illustrates these ideas:

‘Culturally traditional sports including Sepak Takraw are being played in no-fee settings with more people developing interest and participating, whilst Bocce has moved away from a designated competition venue to a social group that travels outside of [LG area] to play. Sports including kabaddi and pencak silat are beginning to develop and seek places to play. ... Organised sports including club-based sports are the preferred model for participation in 15 sports including archery, Australian rules football, basketball, cricket ... Although the recent influence of the South Asian migration has seen the development of a social cricket competition in a 50-week format. ... The hierarchy of facilities will respond to the changing and emerging needs of

the local community through flexible design where one, two or three different sports may operate from the same facility’. [LG ID 17, sport sector]

While LG documents focused on culturally specific sports, state-level documents highlighted areas experiencing migrant population growth, particularly urban and rural regions and the importance of ensuring they have access to spaces that promote physical activity and community integration. While some regions are well-equipped with sports infrastructure, others face challenges due to limited resources.

‘Active environments accessible, high-quality places and spaces can increase population-wide physical activity levels. The availability of open space, and the development of high-quality sport and active recreation infrastructure, is highly variable. Regional and rural Victoria often has different requirements, due to the unique characteristics of these locations. Several factors affect environments for sport and active recreation including population growth, urbanisation, climate change, bushfires, classification of open space, and changes in population demographics’. [State ID 12, sport and recreation sector]

Workplace environment: A federal government document highlighted sport as a means to support the integration of migrants, particularly youth, in a program intended to facilitate their transition to work, and to develop other relevant opportunities. This document stated: ‘[Name of service, a program, is] designed to improve workplace readiness, provide access to vocational opportunities and create strong social connections through education and sports engagement’ [Federal ID 7 Immigration sector]. The document mentioned that the success of this approach is attributed to its integrated strategies and the collaborative partnerships between national departments and local agencies.

‘As a successful example of a more integrated approach to economic and social participation. They deliver outcomes for young refugees and other vulnerable migrants by improving workplace readiness, providing access to

vocational opportunities and creating strong social connections through education and sports engagement’. [Federal ID 7, Immigration sector]

Theme 2: Strategies promoting migrant equity and inclusion

The documents mentioned a few efforts or planned initiatives that directly promoted migrant inclusion and participation in sport. This was mostly referenced in some federal government documents. No information was available from state-level documents. There was no provision of details on budget, timeframes, or legal compliance regarding migrants’ participation in sport. Few strategies promoting migrant inclusion and equity explicitly mentioned migrants (sport sector) and new migrants (immigration sector) as target groups. Other strategies involved integrated initiatives with sport, collaborative partnerships and adopting an existing framework for cross-government collaboration in planning, evaluating, and implementing migrant-focused initiatives. These are outlined below.

Target groups: Federal government documents explicitly identified migrants as a key target group when promoting inclusion and participation in sport across diverse populations. In prioritising areas of inclusion, two sport sector documents distinguished between ‘migrants and culturally and linguistically diverse’ [Federal ID 2, via the national sports plan; Federal ID 9, via the national sports strategy], highlighting migrants as a separate target group to the broader culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) population. While a national consultation paper in the sport sector suggested targeting new migrants, this detail was not reflected in the recently adopted sport strategies. This consultation paper noted, ‘participants suggested a number of target groups who they believed could benefit from a targeted campaign to emphasise the positive benefits of physical activity ... [which] included middle-aged men, new migrants and Indigenous Australians’ [Federal ID 2, sport strategy]. By contrast, two immigration sector documents specified the characteristics of their target migrant group, as ‘*new arrivals*’ [Federal ID 8, government response to immigration sector report] or ‘*newcomers*’ [Federal ID 7, report immigration sector], and also focused on initiatives targeting youth.

The following quote outlines the immigration sector's integrated initiatives using sport to support both employment and social integration in workplace environments:

'[Name of service] provides intensive, pre-employment support for young people aged 15 to 21; ... These [services/initiatives] deliver outcomes for young refugees and other vulnerable migrants by improving workplace readiness, providing access to vocational opportunities and creating strong social connections through education and sports engagement'. [Federal ID 7, immigration sector report]

'Migrants and refugees are a priority cohort under this fund and several projects have a specific focus on migrants and refugees, young people and women'. [Federal ID 8, government response to immigration sector report]

Implementation of national collaborations and local workshops: National immigration documents highlighted collaborative partnerships between government departments and local community services. In contrast, an LG progress report specifically delivered cultural awareness training to local sports clubs and anti-racism workshops. The passages below illustrate such efforts at the federal and LG levels in supporting migration inclusion using sport:

'[Efforts to support] other migrants to successfully settle in Australia ... are already supported through a range of initiatives [considering] sporting groups with refugees and settlement support agencies at a local level. This is already fostering immediate connections between refugees and the communities they live in and is enabling communities to get more involved in supporting successful settlement outcomes. For example, ...football clubs are supporting local refugees to join pre-season training with the support of a buddy, free membership and access to equipment'. [Federal ID 8, government response to immigration sector report]

‘An Inclusion and Diversity Training workshop for local sports clubs was held to build cultural awareness and inclusivity, as well as anti-racism workshops focusing on the impact of racism in our community and how to find allies, speak up and stand up’. [LG ID 18, recreation sector progress report]

Evaluation framework: Only one federal-level document mentioned adopting a migrant-focused framework. This document stated that, “The existing [Name] framework already provides a high-level structural blueprint for Commonwealth, state, territories and local government to work together to effectively plan and deliver services that support the settlement of migrants and new arrivals in Australia” [Federal ID 7, immigration sector report]. A closer review of the framework mentioned sport as an integrated component within activities planned for migrants.

TABLE 3. Overarching categories with the distribution of coding references across predefined categories by government levels (*n* %)

Overarching Category	Predefined Category	Federal	State	Local	Total (<i>n</i> =15)
Policy Implementation & Evaluation	Target Groups	12 (100)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	12
	Goals and Priorities	14 (87.5)	0 (0.0)	2 (12.5)	16
	Implementation	4 (80.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (20.0)	5
	Sector and Collaboration	3 (100)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3
	Evaluation	2 (100)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	2
Social and Cultural Inclusivity and Equity in Sport	Migration and Demographic Shifts	15 (48.4)	2 (6.5)	14 (45.1)	31
	Social and Cultural Contexts	9 (90.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (10.0)	10

	Social and Material Resources	12 (85.7)	0 (0.0)	2 (14.3)	14
	Workplace Environment	3 (100)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3
	Physical Environment and Opportunity	0 (0.0)	2 (20.0)	8 (80.0)	10
	Health and Health Communication	7 (100)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	7
Total	Coding References	91 (74.0)	4 (3.2)	29 (23.4)	124 (100)
	Counts (No. of Documents)	9 (60.0)	1 (6.7)	5 (33.3)	15 (100)

Note. Shaded distribution and intensity interpretation: Dark shade indicates high intensity or frequency, i.e., more documents and references coded to the category. Light colour indicates lower frequency (fewer documents coded to that category).

4 Discussion

The findings highlight that federal and LG documents acknowledged demographic shifts driven by migration, with sociocultural determinants emerging as a focus. For instance, sport-sector documents at the federal level specifically framed sport's role in building migrant social capital through "bridging gaps between diverse communities", particularly "introducing newly arrived communities" in Australia. These findings corroborate previous ideas that sport can unite, as it has the potential to bring people from different cultural backgrounds together, fostering integration via the process of migrants becoming part of the larger society and multiculturalism by celebrating cultural diversity within a society²⁹. However, when considering the development of migrant social capital in Australia, Smith et al³⁰ note that ethnically homogeneous sporting environments can fuel hostility between cultures and limit integration through sport. They therefore argue for the need to identify factors shaping migrant integration in and through sport, and to understand how these factors intersect with distinct cultural preferences among Australia's CALD population³⁰. This is particularly relevant to the rising proportion of

overseas-born residents, including Indian migrants, highlighted in the documents analysed in this study. We concur with Smith et al³⁰ that future research identifying factors shaping migrant integration could also help address existing barriers to access sport and improve physical activity participation among CALD and South Asian groups, including Indian migrants in Australia^{8,9}. Such insights could inform how to tailor sporting environments that cultivate sport's integrative potential within multicultural communities²⁹.

At the LG level, our findings highlight that LG documents recognised the recent influence of South Asian migration and the increasing demand for culturally traditional sports, namely kabaddi and pencak silat, and had adapted the physical environment to consider migrant social and sporting preferences. Consequently, “playing social cricket competition in a 50-week format” together with informal team-based sports and “no-fee settings” were undertaken to accommodate the increasing demand for cultural and social practices, diverging from the preferred organised club-based sporting model. This is consistent with previous work that connecting individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds may require maintaining their traditional practices through games in local parks, informal team sports, or social sporting games^{31,32}. However, the social practice of sport, particularly informal sport, has broad social and cultural implications, yielding both positive and negative impacts³³. Neal et al³³ emphasise how the physical environment used for informal sport can either foster inclusivity or reinforce cultural divides, as experiences of agency, belonging, and urban practices intersect with race, ethnicity, class, gender, and age in these contexts. Overlapping factors such as ethnicity, social dynamics, and migration history could benefit first-generation migrants; for instance, first-generation Indian migrants in the UK viewed parks as spaces children use, while second-generation Indians considered parks as places for physical activity and socialisation³⁴, highlighting the need for outdoor spaces that reflect and meet the sociocultural needs of migrants^{31,35,36}. Further research examining how informal sport shapes migrant experiences of inclusion and exclusion in urban settings is encouraged.

4.1 Strategies to promote migrant equity and inclusion

Documents in this study acknowledged migrant inclusion in sport, yet they lacked detail on the strategies implemented or planned to promote migrant sports participation, particularly at the state level. The minimal presence of details on “Budget,” “Evaluation,” and “Timeframe” may reflect systemic oversight on the feasibility and sustainability of proposed targeted strategies, suggesting migrant inclusion may be aspirational rather than operationalised. These results are consistent with prior research identifying inconsistencies in physical activity policy development, including weak implementation mechanisms and limited systematic evaluation ¹³.

Effective policymaking requires planning key aspects, such as highlighting target groups and time-sensitive evaluation frameworks for implementing initiatives that promote physical activity objectives ¹⁴. Our analysis reveals limited attention to target migrants, with only one national sport sector policy document published in 2024 and a consultation paper in 2023 that differentiated migrants from the broader CALD category. The broader CALD category, which identifies a culturally diverse and migrant-inclusive Australian population ³⁷, may oversimplify the challenges new migrants face related to relocation, work and housing. Identifying migrants as a distinct target group and further disaggregating them by ethnicity could inform tailored approaches to address factors unique to migrants, such as gender and generational preferences to access sport and physical activity ³⁸.

The Australian Government has emphasised targeting migrant subgroups to promote equity and access to its multicultural community ³⁹. For example, Australia’s multicultural access and policy guide identifies subgroups that government departments and agencies could potentially target, such as visibly dominant migrants and those from collectivist backgrounds. Such ideas are consistent with previous work using a content analysis of physical activity policy documents from Denmark, Finland, Romania and England targeting subgroups based on life stages (working age, children, aging population), ethnic groups, place-based participation sites such as sports clubs, sports volunteers, immigrants and ethnic minority populations ⁴⁰. In contrast, the documents

reviewed in this study lack granularity. Visibly dominant migrant groups, such as Indians, who often present low levels of physical activity⁸, could be overlooked and be a priority group, particularly in Victoria and relevant LGs, as in this study. Similarly, migrants from collectivist cultures may also experience different social norms within Australia's more individualistic society⁴¹, warranting a tailored national sports strategy to represent them at the broader, whole-of-population level.

The lack of migrant-focused frameworks highlighted in this study may also explain the limited strategies planned or implemented to promote migrant participation. Immigration sector documents reviewed in this study reflected a proactive cross-sector approach to engage migrant communities, from adopting a migrant-focused framework to plan and deliver initiatives⁴², which the sport sector currently lacks. Adopting a migrant-focused framework or checklist could be a critical starting point for improving the integration of migrant communities into sports initiatives.

Policymakers, for instance, at the state level, could refer to the Australian Government multicultural access and equity policy guide³⁹ for practical strategies to identify target groups and key group characteristics such as leadership, engagement, performance, capability, responsiveness and openness when planning and delivering services in Australia's multicultural society. Such information can tailor policies to promote equitable access in sport, ensuring the needs of migrants are met with those of the broader Australian population. The national sport sector could draw on local sports clubs and community-based programs to broaden its reach to migrants via settlement initiatives and collaborate with the immigration and health sectors. A proposed multilevel framework serving as an overarching analytical tool for sport programs may enhance migrant integration by addressing macro-level policy, meso-level club structure, and micro-level individual experiences⁴³. A bottom-up model⁴⁴, where policy is shaped by frameworks emerging from local organised or community recreational sports clubs, could offer a more community-driven approach⁴³. This may ensure policies approach co-design and remain practical and culturally responsive to the needs of the local migrant community, contributing to reduced health inequalities in sport and physical activity.

4.2 Intersectional lens for promoting local sport participation

At the LG level, our findings highlighted that documents from Victoria mentioned accommodating culturally specific sports such as kabaddi, demonstrating how policy reflects intersections between the physical environment and sociocultural contexts of sport. LGs with a high Indian population could develop strategies that expand flexible sports facilities and culturally responsive options. This may include incorporating traditional sports within outdoor social sport formats and multisport facilities, while offering accessible fee structures such as pay-as-you-go options or dedicated migrant 'come and try' initiatives. Such efforts align with previous empirical work advocating the adaptation of sport facilities to accommodate cultural needs through an intersectional lens, combining social and physical factors to promote social integration of Indian ¹⁰ and CALD migrant communities ³⁰ in Australia.

At the state level, a targeted state-level sport and physical activity policy should reinforce local efforts, by addressing the structural and social aspects to promote equitable participation, particularly considering the low physical activity levels among Victoria's rising Indian population. Such policies are important for ethnic migrants whose engagement in physical activity often depends on their perception of social environments ⁴⁵, and despite access to sporting and outdoor physical activity facilities, individuals in socially isolated communities remain at a higher risk of inactivity ⁴⁶.

4.3 Limitations

Findings are limited by reliance on documents from LGs in Greater Melbourne, Victoria, with a high population of Indians. Despite the different search strategies, some documents may have been overlooked. Further research could include documents from LGs where Indian communities have resettled, particularly those representing regional areas of Melbourne. A systematic search protocol could also ensure comprehensive coverage of documents. The predefined coding approach currently applied was restricted to textual units that explicitly linked sport or physical activity to migrants

within the predefined contextual categories. This deductive approach excluded references in categories such as social and material resources, where the mention of digital platforms and esports was not explicitly connected to migrant outcomes. Applying an intersectionality-based policy analysis framework ⁴⁷, which uses an inductive approach that allows both descriptive and transformative categories to emerge, could generate an evidence base that better connects otherwise isolated contextual references to migrant participation outcomes. The study does not fully capture the underlying motives, values, or ideologies of migrants, and exclusive reliance on publicly available content introduces the risk of biases inherent in public records. Future research could consider interviewing policymakers or migrant representatives to gain deeper contextual insights into policies that promote migrant sport and physical activity and validate the findings. Nonetheless, documentary analysis offered an unobtrusive and cost-effective method, and the deductive category system ensured categories and coding aligned with the aims, providing face validity for the coding framework ¹⁹. The findings serve as a reference point for policymakers on contextual considerations and strategic options when developing future migrant-sport policy initiatives.

5 Conclusion

This study contributes to an evidence base of government sport and physical activity (recreation) policy documents in Australia between 2014 and 2024, focusing on migrants. While government documents mentioned the role of sport and physical activity in migrant integration, there is an uneven distribution of attention across the three government levels. The findings reveal the need for enhanced intergovernmental collaboration between the state government and LGs, improved granularity of migrant target groups, and stronger mechanisms to evaluate policy impact. Adopting intersectional approaches to advance migrant equity is encouraged, particularly with Victoria's rising Indian migrant population, with an urgent need for a comprehensive state-level sport policy targeting migrants.

Contributors

Author SF conceived the idea, design, data acquisition and analysis, interpretation, writing of the original content, edited and revised drafts. Author EH cross validated the data analysis and offered feedback on all drafts. Both authors read and approved this manuscript.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

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Data Sharing Statement

No additional data are available.

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