



Australian Government  
Australian Public Service Commission

# The Australian Public Service's data on Cultural and Linguistic Diversity: key insights

Workforce Insights Group  
Research Note 15-23



# The APS's CALD workforce is multi-dimensional

- The Australian Public Service (APS) recognises the multi-dimensional nature of its culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) workforce.
- To avoid the limitation of a single definition, it is recommended that many CALD components be captured to appropriately represent CALD communities (Pham et al., 2021).<sup>1</sup>
- A broad range of CALD-related data is captured through APS agencies' human resources (HR) information systems and made available centrally with the APS Employment Database (APSED). This HR data is supplemented by employee perception data captured through surveys such as the APS Employee Census.
- These varied sources of information enable rich insight into the composition and experiences of the APS workforce. This research note examines three dimensions: **first language spoken**, **region of birth**, and **cultural background**.

1. Pham, T. T. L., Berecki-Gisolf, J., Clapperton, A., O'Brien, K. S., Liu, S., & Gibson, K. (2021). Definitions of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD): A Literature Review of Epidemiological Research in Australia. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(2), 737. <https://doi.org/10.3390%2Fijerph18020737>

# First language spoken data provides insights into the cultural and linguistic backgrounds and ethnicities of APS employees



*“[First language spoken data...] provides accurate information about a person’s cultural and linguistic background, as First Language Spoken does not change over a person’s lifetime, and is regarded as a good surrogate measure of ethnicity because of its connection with a person’s origins and the origins of his or her parents.”*

# Over time, employee backgrounds and ethnicities are becoming more diverse – though not at the senior levels

Classification levels of employees whose first language spoken was English and another language or a language other than English, December 2003 vs December 2022

Classification level	First language spoken was English and another language or a language other than English	
	December 2003	December 2022
APS1	18	14
APS2	19	31
APS3	20	30
APS4	19	25
APS5	18	24
APS6	18	25
EL1	17	22
EL2	13	17
SES1	11	11
SES2	10	10
SES3	7	8

# Many portfolios have at least 1 in 5 employees whose first language was not English only, with some portfolios like Treasury's having 1 in 3

**Portfolio distribution of employees whose first language spoken was English and another language or a language other than English, December 2022**

Portfolio	Per cent
Veterans' Affairs	18
Prime Minister and Cabinet	18
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts	19
Defence	19
Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water	19
Finance	19
Attorney-General's	20
Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry	21

**Portfolio distribution of employees whose first language spoken was English and another language or a language other than English, December 2022 (cont'd)**

Portfolio	Per cent
Education	21
Foreign Affairs and Trade	22
Employment and Workplace Relations	22
Health and Aged Care	22
Social Services	23
<i>APS average</i>	24
Industry, Science and Resources	25
Home Affairs	28
Treasury	32

# Leaders are managing a workforce that has become more diverse in terms of cultural and linguistic backgrounds and ethnicities

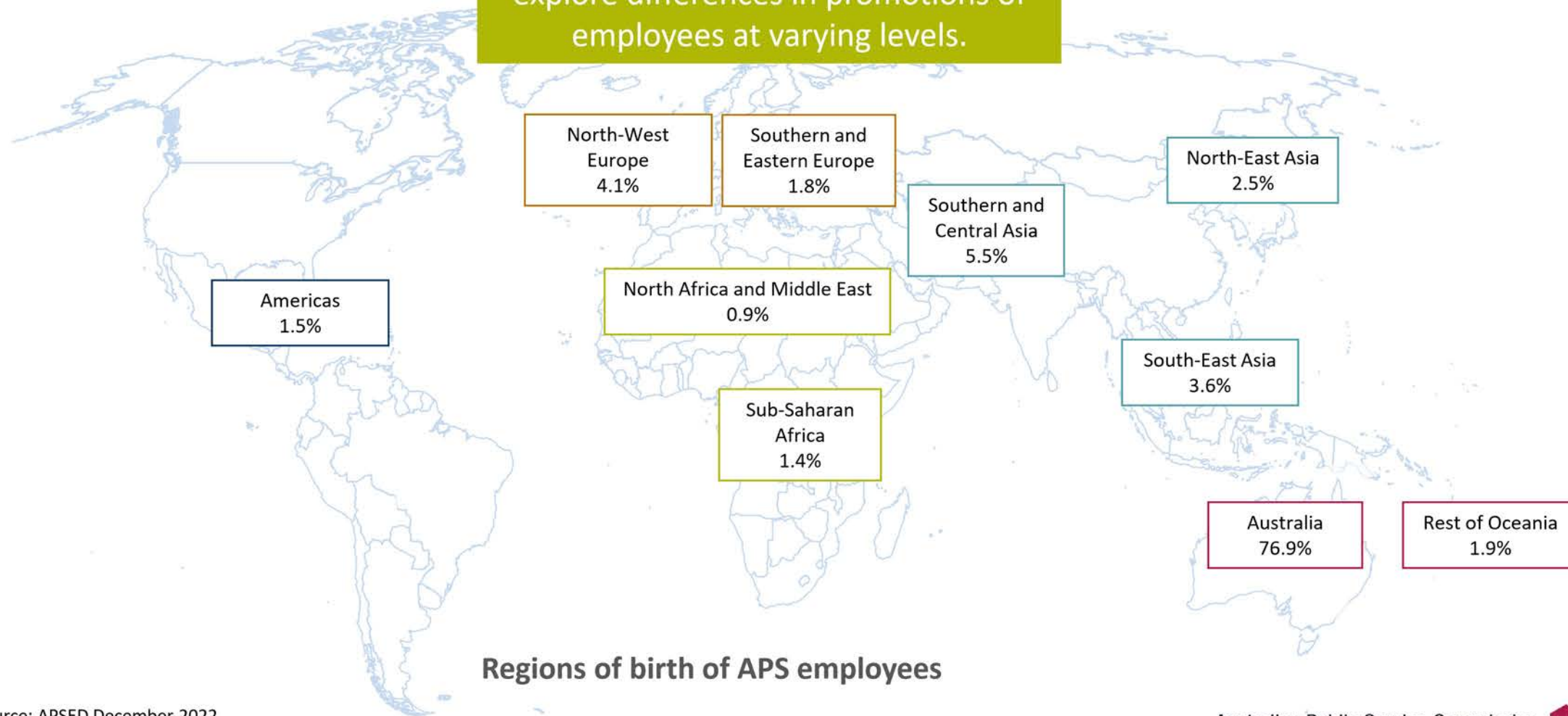
- All portfolios have substantial proportions of employees that first spoke either English and another language, or a language other than English.
- Despite growing numbers of employees who either speak diverse languages or who come from more diverse backgrounds and ethnicities, SES cohorts have changed the least since 2003.
- Diversity trends are expected to continue. Leaders will benefit from developing their understanding of different cultures and perspectives, and their capabilities in intercultural sensitivity and adaptation, to enable them to more effectively manage diverse workforces (FECCA, 2013).





# The workforce is also diverse in where people are born: the APS has almost 1 in 4 people born outside of Australia

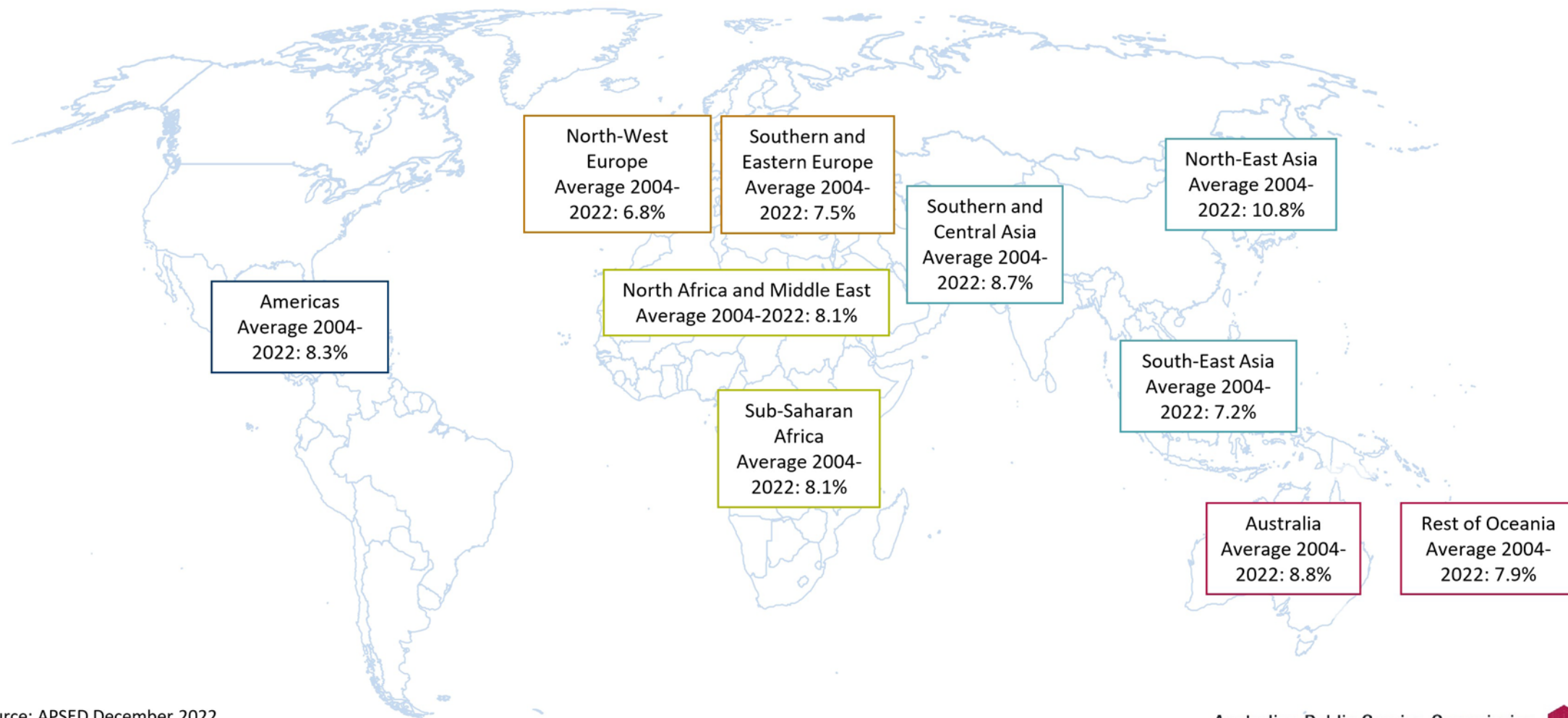
This diversity allows us to better explore differences in promotions of employees at varying levels.





# Australian-born employees have historically high promotion rates, on average, over 2004 to 2022, exceeded only by North-East Asian born

Average annual promotion rate (2004 to 2022) based on region of birth



Source: APSED December 2022.

# Non-Australian born employees though have different promotions experiences depending upon country of birth

These employees had lower promotions odds compared to those born in Australia:

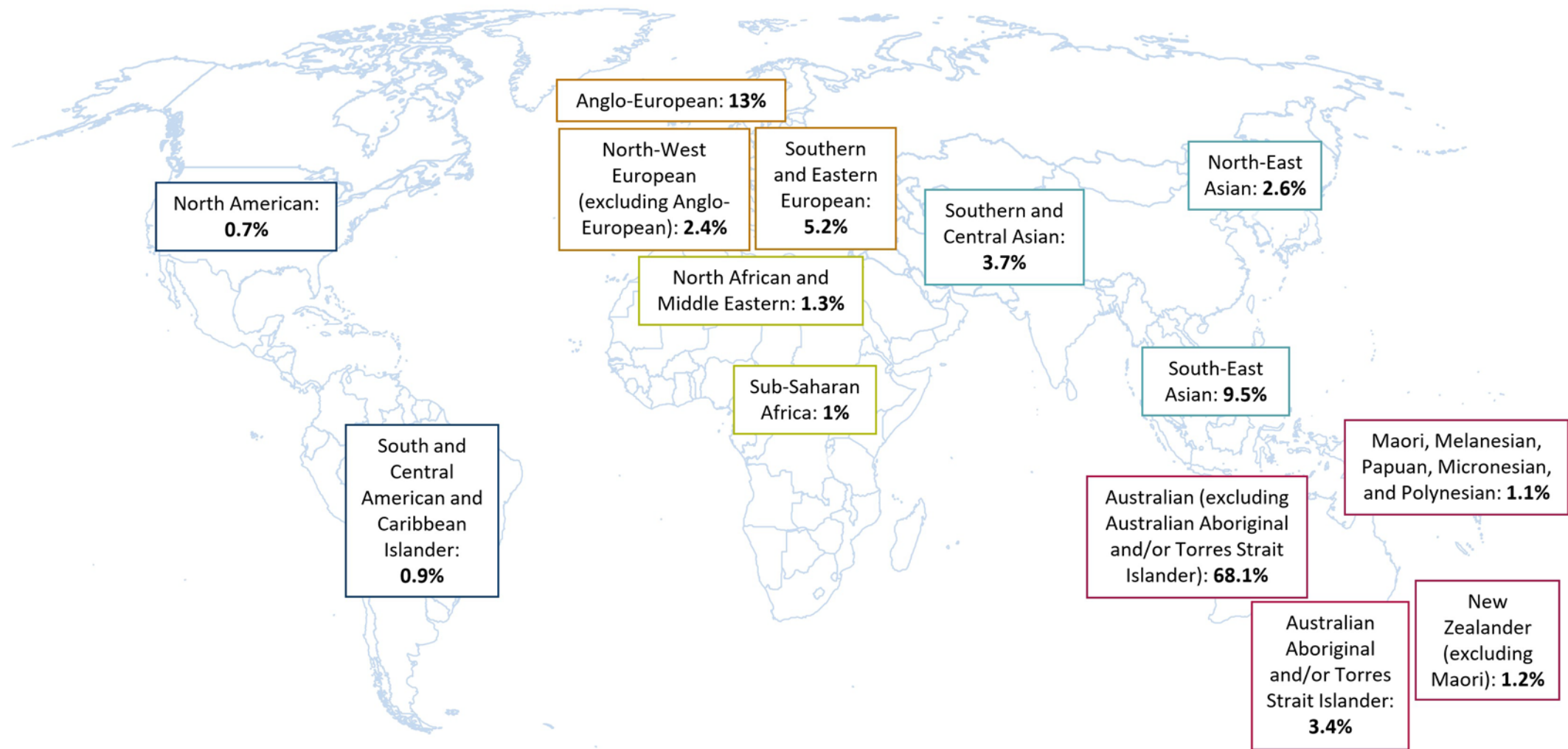
Region of birth	Levels affected	Likelihood of promotion compared to Australian born
North-East Asia	EL1	30% lower
Oceania and Antarctica (excluding Australia)	APS5, EL1	20% lower
South-East Asia	APS3 to EL1	20-30% lower
Sub-Saharan Africa	EL1	30% lower

These employees had higher promotions odds compared to those born in Australia:

Region of birth	Levels affected	Likelihood of promotion compared to Australian born
North-East Asia	APS4	20% higher
North-West Europe	APS5, APS6	10% higher
Southern and Central Asia	APS6	10% higher

Source: APSC logistic regressions based on APSED data, 2017-2022. Controls for factors that could impact on promotion odds: reported First Nations, disability, and Non-English Speaking Background status; age; reported bachelor degree and above qualifications; experience at level and in the APS; central agency experience; graduate or trainee program participation; whether the employee has taken maternity leave and/or leave without pay for longer than 3 months and reported to the APSC; whether an employee was ongoing or worked full time; whether the employees office location was in Canberra; the job family that the employee worked in before promotion; and their region of birth (based on their country of birth). Note that APSED has missing data across these factors, and so these results are indicative.

# APS employees also identify with a diverse range of cultural backgrounds



*Note: As respondents could select more than one response, totals may not sum to 100%.*



# The 2023 APS Employee Census allows us to examine employee experiences based on cultural background



The APS Employee Census provides insight into employees' views about the APS, their agency and their workplace.

Questions include employee views on:

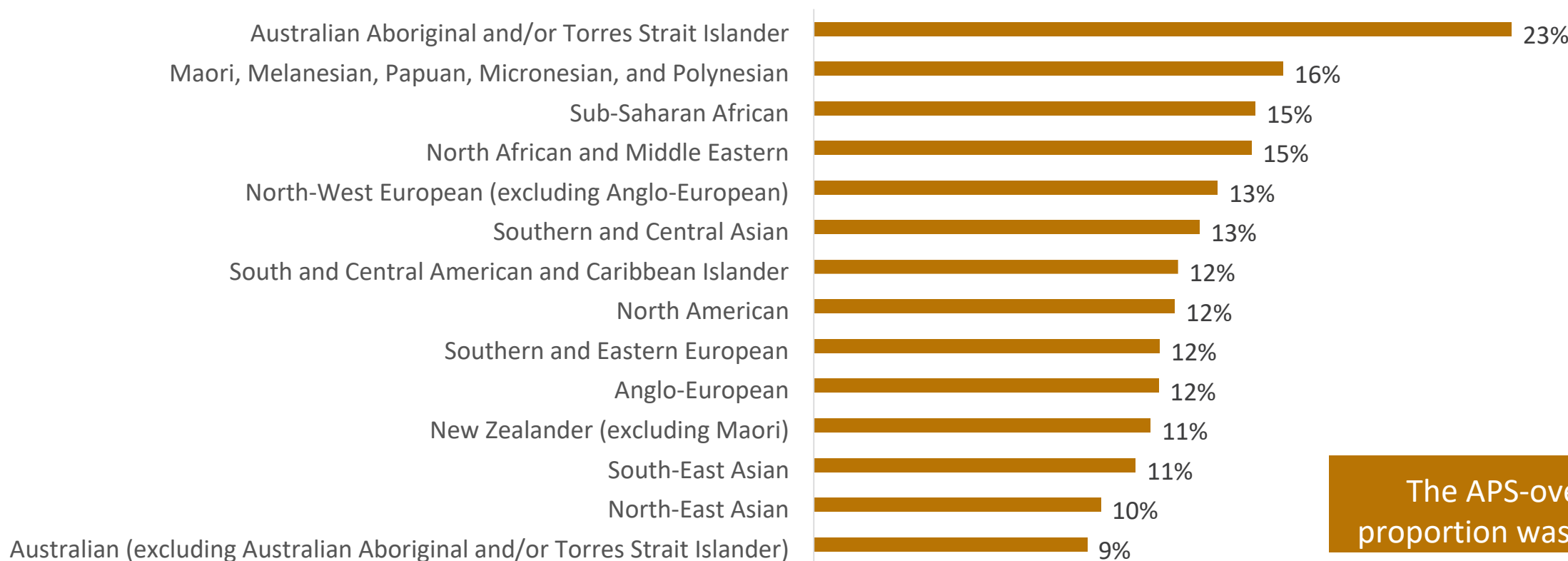
- engagement
- wellbeing policies and support
- leadership.

This research note draws out insights based on perceived discrimination.

Note: The proportion of APS employees who reported experiencing discrimination in the last 12 months during their course of employment was 10.4%.

# Perceptions of discrimination reported by Australian Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background employees were notably higher than all others

During the last 12 months and in the course of your employment, have you experienced discrimination on the basis of your background or a personal characteristic?

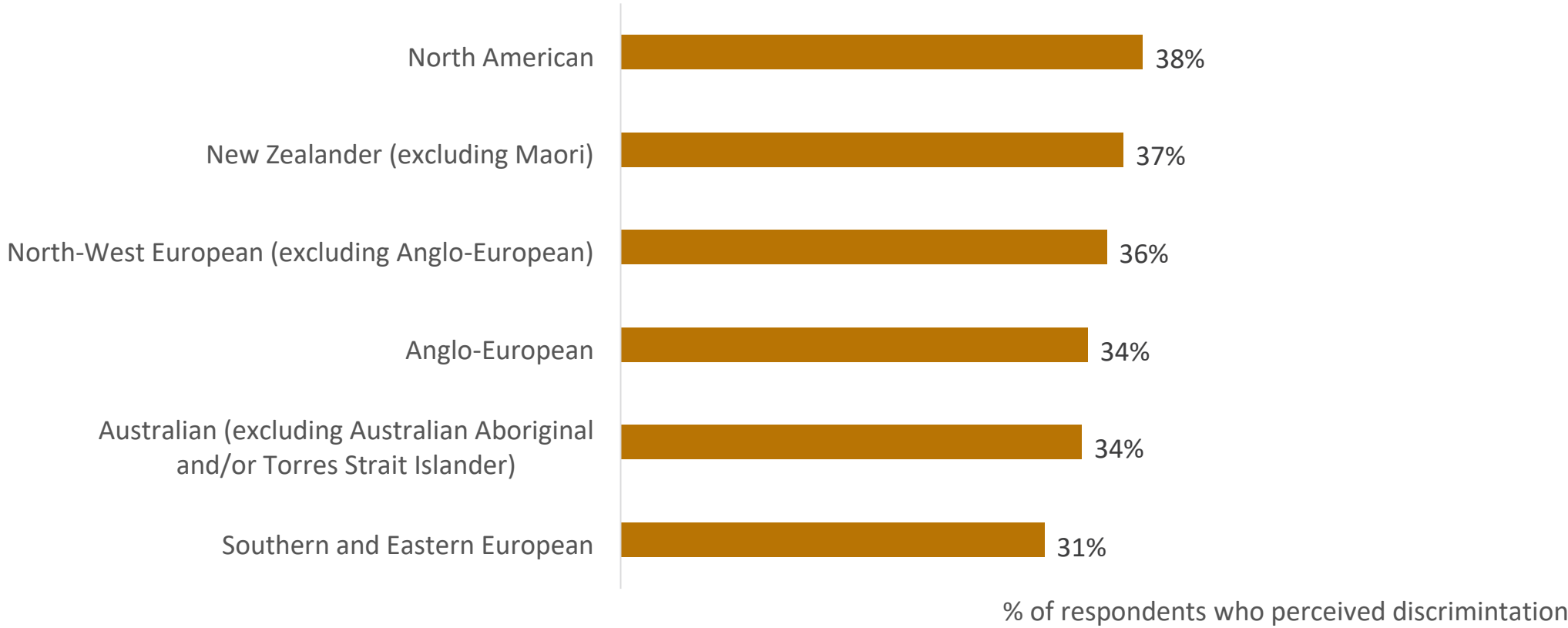


The APS-overall proportion was 10.4

% yes

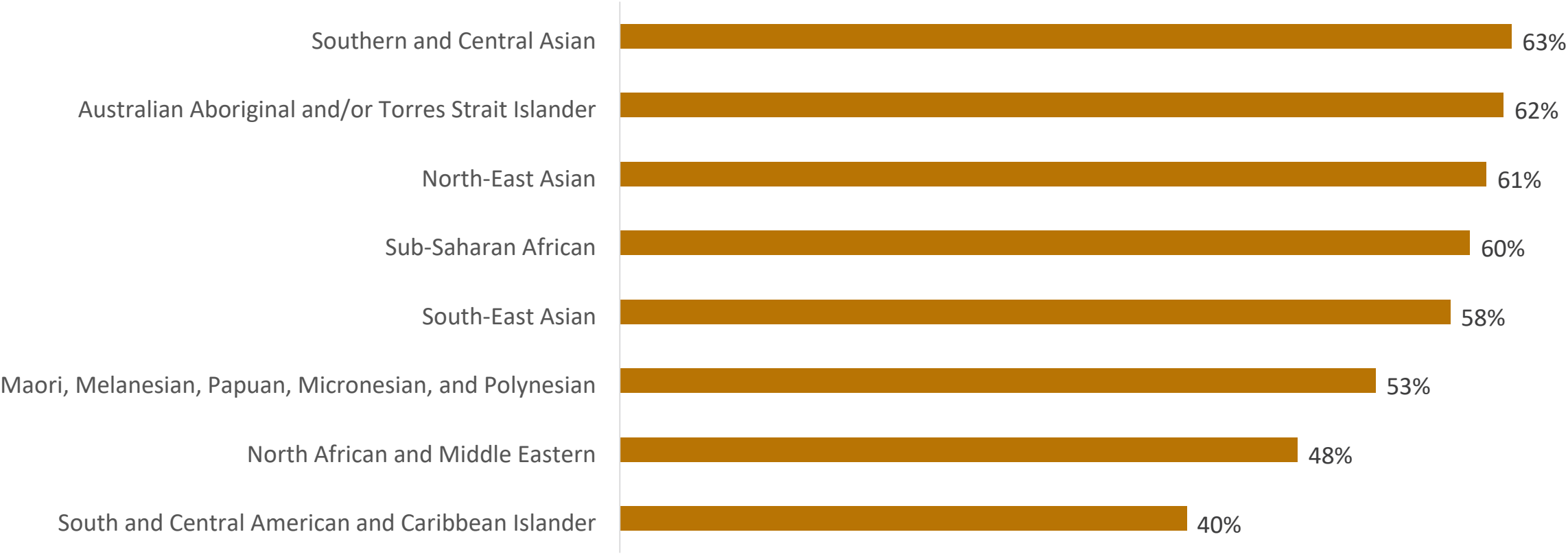
# Gender was most commonly identified as the basis of perceived discrimination by those of Australian and European heritage backgrounds

Per cent of employees who identified gender as the basis of discrimination that they had experienced, 2023



# In contrast, race was most commonly identified as the basis of perceived discrimination by those from other cultural backgrounds

Per cent of employees who identified race as the basis of discrimination that they had experienced, 2023



Note: discrimination on the basis of race was taken to include those who perceived experiences of discrimination on the basis of race and/or their identification as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person.

% of respondents who perceived discrimination



No experience of discrimination, regardless of type, is acceptable. The difference in the most common basis of perceived discrimination between these groups can help with the design of anti-discrimination activities.

- APS Employee Census 2023 data suggests that the most common basis for experiences of discrimination can differ depending upon cultural background.
  - Those employees of Australian and European heritage, on the one hand, reported their gender as the most common basis of discrimination.
  - Those of other cultural backgrounds reported race as the most common basis.
- This suggests that actions that focus on addressing gender concerns, by themselves, may not be enough to address the most discrimination reported by employees who identify from other cultural backgrounds.—

The APS' CALD workforce are not homogenous; they have diverse backgrounds and different experiences with promotions and discrimination



- This research note has highlighted the diversity of the APS' CALD workforce across their **first language spoken**, **region of birth**, and **cultural background**.
- Taking a multi-dimensional approach to the APS' CALD workforce allows us to see that:  
 First language spoken diversity can be seen across most levels of the APS and across portfolios.  
 Promotions experiences vary between employees born outside of Australia.  
 Experiences of discrimination, particularly the type experienced, can differ depending upon an employee's cultural background.



# The Cultural Capability Hub has been developed to increase the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural capability of APS employees



The Cultural Capability Hub (Hub) is a central repository of practical guidance and suggested resources to support staff to uplift their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural capability.

The Hub aims to support and build from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Capability – A Framework for Commonwealth Agencies (CCF). It provides additional recommendations, insights and links to external resources on how you can apply the Knowing, Doing and Being domains of cultural capability in your operational context.

This content has been provided by the Australian Public Service Commission in partnership with the National Indigenous Australians Agency and the Department of Defence.

The Cultural Capability Hub includes self-paced learning modules with links to practical guidance, suggested tools and resources. The Hub supports agencies to implement the [\*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Capability – A Framework for Commonwealth Agencies\*](#) (the Cultural Capability Framework) to improve their own and others' cultural capability. It demonstrates the skills, knowledge and practices for working in a culturally informed way.

It includes:

- Guidance on applying the 'Knowing, Doing, Being' model in the Cultural Capability Framework.
- User profiles showing the skills, knowledge, behaviours, resources and qualifications which may be beneficial for uplifting cultural capability in different job roles.
- Case studies on how HR practitioners, line managers and senior executives can work towards uplifting their cultural capability.

For more information see: [www.apsacademy.gov.au/cultural-capability-hub](http://www.apsacademy.gov.au/cultural-capability-hub).

# CALD capability in the APS will also be improved through MOSAIC

MOSAIC: Multicultural Organisation – Staff Awareness, Innovation and Capability, is a project funded through the APS Reform Office Capability Reinvestment Fund (CRF). The APSC is working with partner agencies (Home Affairs, DoF, PM&C) to develop an APS-wide program of work that promotes cultural and linguistic diversity within the APS and address barriers to representation and career progression of CALD employees.

The project includes:



- **Development and roll out of a digital learning package for APS managers (APS6-SES)** to 'recruit, build and manage multicultural teams'. The learning product is being developed to support uplift of manager and leader capability, to improve cultural capability and attraction, retention and progression of culturally diverse talent across the APS.



- **A cultural diversity sprint project** management methodology pack based on PM&C's model, that can be delivered in any agency. The sprint package enables agencies to develop insights to inform targeted localised support specific to their agency and will complement APS wide initiatives.



- **Establishment of an APS-wide network of CALD champions** to support existing APS employees to engage on matters that affect them in the workplace and in their APS careers.
- **Increasing representation of CALD staff on the EL2 Capability Development** program (EDGE).



Supporting CALD staff to increase representation and senior representation within key decision-making job families (such as policy), will ensure the views of our diverse communities are represented in the advice to and decisions within Government, ensuring the APS has the capability to do its job well.

\*The APSC Workforce Planning Centre of Excellence are developing an additional insights report.

For further information please  
contact:  
Economic Analysis team  
People Insights Branch  
[economicanalysis@apsc.gov.au](mailto:economicanalysis@apsc.gov.au)