

# Volunteering in CALD communities

RESEARCH BRIEFING, MAY 2020

## Summary

Volunteerism is a powerful way of encouraging more people to engage in civic and development activities at a local and national level. It enhances people's capacity, builds community participation and social cohesion.<sup>1</sup> In Victoria, the value of volunteers to the economy has been estimated at nearly \$42 billion per year.<sup>2</sup> The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognises that volunteers are key to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This paper identifies existing barriers to volunteering for people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.<sup>3</sup> It discusses policy options for fostering increased and sustained CALD participation in formal volunteering and explores potential contributions from informal volunteering. The evidence presented is based on community consultations facilitated by AMES Australia supplemented by an extensive literature review.

## Key findings

- Limited knowledge about volunteering is a major participation barrier for CALD communities
- Recruiting and supporting volunteers from CALD backgrounds is a challenge for Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs)
- Volunteering information may be best shared through informal communication channels and community consultations
- Volunteers from CALD backgrounds often need support to transition from volunteering into paid work
- Data on informal volunteering activities within CALD communities is not currently being captured

## Next steps

Through engagement, outreach and service provision, AMES Australia can partner with the Victorian Government to maximise the social and economic benefits of CALD volunteering in Victoria.

## Research overview

Volunteers from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds make significant contributions to Australian communities.<sup>4</sup> At the last Census, people born overseas accounted for over one-quarter of all volunteers in Australia (26%) and Victoria (27%).<sup>5</sup> There are also informal voluntary contributions taking place within CALD communities which are not captured in available data.<sup>6</sup> Unrecognised voluntary contributions may be preventing people from CALD backgrounds from utilising their experience to transition into employment, while also overlooking their unique cultural contributions to society.

Barriers faced by CALD communities in accessing formal volunteer positions are similar to those faced in the labour market. These include typically lower English language proficiency, transport access barriers, and childcare responsibilities (in the absence of family to assist with childcare or a reluctance to leave children in the care of strangers). A recent survey of 661 Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs)<sup>7</sup> identified that 86% of VIOs needed more volunteers but lacked the resources to recruit people with participation barriers such as CALD communities.<sup>8</sup>

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AMES Australia believes in full participation and inclusion for all in a cohesive and diverse society. Our work with people from migrant and refugee backgrounds is guided by a holistic Settlement Framework for Social and Economic Participation, which addresses domains of Health and Wellbeing, Education, Employment, and Safety and Security. AMES Australia provides services including: Humanitarian Settlement, Education, Employment, Youth, Prevention of Violence against Women, Skilled Migration, and Disability Support, among others.

This briefing paper has been produced as part of the AMES Australia CALD Knowledge Exchange program, which develops and shares evidence on the social and economic participation of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities. Knowledge products aim to capture institutional innovations and specialist knowledge and use it to build the capacity of CALD communities, service providers and government agencies.

## CALD volunteers in the Victorian community

In the twelve months prior to Census night in 2016, 257,170 people in Victoria who were born overseas spent time doing unpaid voluntary work through an organisation or group.<sup>9</sup>

Over 12,000 volunteers in Victoria, or approximately 7% of all volunteers, did not speak English well or at all at the time of the Census.<sup>10</sup> Data from the 2014 ABS General Social Survey (GSS) indicates that recent migrants are less likely than people born in Australia to have done voluntary work in the last 12 months (26% compared to 35%). Migrants who had been in Australia longer (i.e. non-recent migrants) were slightly more likely to have done voluntary work than recent migrants at this time (27%).<sup>11</sup>

The Australian Census and Migrants Integrated dataset (ACMID) links the Census with Permanent Migrant Settlement data from the Department of Home Affairs.<sup>12</sup> ACMID data suggests that there is a pattern of volunteering skewed towards certain migrant cohorts and/or settlement outcomes (see Table 1 below). For instance, humanitarian entrants and those living in the most socio-economically disadvantaged areas of Victoria are least likely to be volunteers. This suggests that characteristics of the migration intake and place-based opportunities impact on rates of volunteering amongst CALD communities. Migrants are also more likely to volunteer if they are unemployed.

Empirical research has also identified that informal volunteering in CALD communities takes place outside mainstream and formal organisations,<sup>13</sup> often in the form of care work for children, older people, people with long-term illness and disability, and domestic work.

In CALD communities, cultural differences can lead many to see the volunteering they are doing as a community obligation and not as ‘formal’ volunteering by industry definitions. This is common amongst refugee groups, who often come from communal rather than individual cultures.<sup>14</sup> The 2016 Census captured activities such as care work, however these are not included in questions about volunteering, and therefore not accurately depicted in official volunteering reporting.

**Table 1. Volunteering amongst permanent migrants, key statistics from ACMID**

<b>Migrant status</b>	Volunteers are more likely to have arrived through the Skilled visa stream (18.0%) than Family (13.6%) and Humanitarian streams (12.6%).
<b>Employment status</b>	Migrants who are unemployed and looking for full-time work (21.4%) or part-time work (26.4%) have higher rates of volunteering than those who are employed or not in the labour force.
<b>Index of Socio-Economic Disadvantage</b>	Areas that have high levels of disadvantage have the lowest rates of volunteering amongst permanent migrants (in Decile 1–highest level of disadvantage–the volunteering rate is 8.7% compared to Decile 10–lowest disadvantage–where the volunteering rate is 10%).

*“...volunteering fulfils a desire to service the community—giving something back and not just taking”*  
(AMES CALD volunteer)

In 2015, Volunteering Australia broadened its definition of volunteering to better capture informal activities. The definition changed from a focus on organised forms to ‘time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain.’ A large national survey of volunteers conducted in 2016 and incorporating this change asked respondents to categorise their activities, finding that almost half of the 2,304 respondents participated in informal volunteering. Nineteen percent of these survey respondents came from a non-English speaking background.<sup>15</sup> Future data collection efforts by the ABS will attempt to incorporate informal volunteering.<sup>16</sup>

## Benefits of growing CALD volunteerism

There is a strong social and economic case for fostering volunteering amongst CALD communities. Accounting for increases in population and annual hours of volunteer work, the projected value of volunteering (including formal, informal, and travel) in Victoria in 2021 is approximately \$42 billion.<sup>17</sup> Not-for-profit charity organisations are largely

reliant on volunteers who represent more than twice their paid workforce.<sup>18</sup>

As the Victorian population becomes more culturally diverse, there is also a growing need for organisations to reflect and better service this diversity. As sectors such as disability and aged care continue to grow,<sup>19</sup> they will increasingly require and benefit from the language and cultural skills of CALD volunteers.

CALD volunteers are also vital for the delivery of many settlement programs. Volunteers who have a lived migrant or refugee experience are highly valued by the newly arrived communities they support, with many later engaging in similar volunteering roles because of the support they received during their settlement. As an example, at the time of writing AMES Australia had 41 volunteers supporting the delivery of key programs who were former clients of AMES settlement or education programs.<sup>20</sup>

Volunteering has also been found to have direct positive benefits for new arrivals' physical and mental health, improved access to healthcare and cultural and social integration outcomes. These factors have a direct correlation to successful settlement.<sup>21</sup>

Volunteering in an Australian workplace can also support employment-related outcomes for CALD individuals, such as increased confidence, learning about Australian workplace culture, and enhanced English. In a 2016 national survey on volunteering, 59% of respondents from a non-English speaking background reported that they had become more patient as a result of volunteering, followed by increased confidence (56%) and learning a new language (54%).<sup>22</sup>

*"...when you volunteer you feel you're not alone, you have someone to talk to, practice English quicker."  
(AMES CALD volunteer)*

According to 2016 Census data, recent migrants and temporary residents are more likely to be unemployed than people born in Australia (7.4% compared to 5.4%). A significant proportion of this cohort experience difficulties obtaining their first job in Australia because of a lack of Australian work experience or references.<sup>23</sup> If volunteering is

feasible for CALD job seekers, it provides a useful opportunity to gain the local experience that many employers are looking for, thereby reducing the risk of welfare dependency and under-utilisation of job skills.

## Key findings

### Limited knowledge about volunteering is a major participation barrier for CALD communities

Lack of awareness about volunteering and its benefits prevents greater uptake in volunteering by people from CALD backgrounds, particularly recently arrived migrants and refugees. Roles such as helping and supporting families are central to the daily life of many CALD communities, however, the concept of 'volunteering' as defined in Australia may not translate easily into other languages and cultures. National consultation with CALD communities has identified that volunteering can be an 'alien concept' within some communities.<sup>24</sup>

*"...the idea of 'volunteering' doesn't exist in my country. It isn't an option people know about."  
– AMES CALD volunteer*

An Australian study also found that perceptions of volunteering and volunteering organisations varied widely across different CALD groups, from 'service to society' to 'slavery', and the appropriateness for men or women only to engage in volunteering.<sup>25</sup> Experiences in countries of origin—for example, negative experiences with state institutions—can also impact on preparedness to volunteer in formal organisations.<sup>26</sup>

A culturally informed approach that considers the heterogeneous makeup of Victoria's CALD communities and any preconceived notions of volunteering is necessary for building awareness within CALD communities.

In 2012, the former Victorian Department of Planning and Community Development funded a CALD Volunteer Engagement Project at AMES to further engage CALD communities in volunteering. The project identified that many newly arrived CALD communities were not aware of how to find volunteer opportunities, did not understand the volunteer process, time or commitment needed,

and had a general lack of confidence about volunteering.<sup>27</sup>

The project recommended the development of a Multicultural Volunteer Resource Centre to:

- provide training and resources for VIOs to engage CALD communities,
- for ethno-specific organisations to develop and implement best practice volunteer programs, and
- to provide an avenue into volunteering for individuals wishing to volunteer by providing an overview of opportunities in Victoria.

### **Recruiting and supporting volunteers from CALD backgrounds can be a challenge for Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs)**

A number of services exist in Victoria to support and place volunteers, such as peak bodies, volunteer resource centres and online volunteer registers and portals.<sup>28</sup> These are referred to as Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs).

Through engagement and service delivery to CALD communities, AMES Australia has found that people from migrant backgrounds can face difficulties connecting with VIOs—especially if CALD communities lack information, training or resources. VIOs may also lack adaptable and flexible volunteer management practices to effectively engage CALD volunteers. These issues are compounded when organisations lack necessary human and financial resources. Crucially, there may be a lack of cultural awareness or culturally appropriate information to engage and sustain CALD individuals in mainstream VIO roles.

To increase CALD engagement in formal volunteer roles, VIOs may need to review their volunteer recruitment processes with a view to increasing the flexibility of, and access to, their volunteer positions.

### **Volunteering information may be best shared through informal communication channels and community consultations**

Through community engagement, AMES Australia has found that CALD individuals commonly learn about volunteering through word of mouth within their local community, school, or church, and

increasingly via online communities such as ethno-specific Facebook groups.

*"...I'm in a 'Pakistanis in Melbourne' Facebook group, where people share lots of useful information."  
(AMES CALD volunteer)*

Earlier arrived humanitarian entrants are known to provide critical support networks and knowledge to new arrivals.<sup>29</sup> Established CALD communities can play a lead role in helping newly arrived individuals to overcome any misunderstandings about volunteering if they are supported to do so. Community consultations or passing practical information onto community leaders are ways in which CALD communities can build awareness of volunteering. The promotion of volunteering may be best led by trained volunteer 'champions' or 'mentors.'

### **Volunteers from CALD backgrounds often need support to transition from volunteering into paid work**

Volunteering can be a pathway into employment. However, bridging the gap between volunteering and paid work is not always straightforward for CALD volunteers.

For example, CALD communities may not recognise or utilise the networking opportunities available through formal volunteering. Expanding professional networks may increase the likelihood that CALD individuals learn about job vacancies or gain valuable advice on career pathways. This is critical in the Australian job market, where it is estimated that between 60-80% of vacancies are not publicly advertised.<sup>30</sup>

CALD volunteers may also not recognise how skills gained through volunteering, such as data entry, customer service, or administration, may be transferrable to paid employment. AMES Australia consultations with CALD volunteers showed that some CALD volunteers remain in less challenging volunteer roles for long periods where their skill development and confidence can plateau.

*"... [CALD] volunteers would benefit from English and IT classes... and would feel like they are members of an organisation."  
(AMES CALD volunteer)*

## **Data on informal volunteering activities within CALD communities is not currently being captured**

Volunteers from CALD backgrounds are under-reported in official data sources such as the ABS. Without an accurate record of CALD participation in volunteering, it is difficult to support CALD volunteers participating in unpaid work or understand the true societal value of this work.

For example, AMES Australia's consultations revealed that CALD communities often provide cultural advice to government, translation and interpreting services for family and friends in hospitals, disseminate government information, and are called on to share their culture with the wider community. This work is important for policy makers and organisations working with and supporting CALD communities.

The contributions of CALD job seekers engaged in informal volunteering may also not be recognised as 'approved activities' by *jobactive* employment services and therefore risk not meeting mutual obligation requirements.

## **Next steps**

AMES Australia has developed this research briefing on the basis of consultation with CALD communities and our existing CALD volunteers (see Figure 1 below). We will continue to share this knowledge through opportunities for public policy development, such as the consultation on Victoria's whole-of-government Volunteer Strategy.<sup>31</sup>

Through engagement, outreach and service provision, AMES Australia can partner with the Victorian Government to improve CALD volunteering rates and maximise the social and economic benefits of volunteering in Victoria.

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## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> UN Volunteers (2020), [Volunteerism and the Global Goals](#).
- <sup>2</sup> DPCD (2012), *The Economic Value of Volunteering in Victoria*, State Government of Victoria, Department of Planning and Community Development.
- <sup>3</sup> Formal volunteering is defined as time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain, taking place within organisations (including institutions and agencies) in a structured way. Informal volunteering is defined as time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain, taking place outside the context of a formal organisation (Source: Volunteering Australia).
- <sup>4</sup> Hugo, G. (2011), *A Significant Contribution: The Economic, Social and Civic Contributions of First and Second Generation Humanitarian Entrants*. Australian Government, Department of Immigration and Citizenship.
- <sup>5</sup> ABS (2016), *Census – Counting Persons, Place of Usual Residence*, Australian Bureau of Statistics. Findings based on use of ABS TableBuilder data.
- <sup>6</sup> Cultural and Indigenous Research Centre Australia (CIRCA) for the Department of Social Services (2016) [Giving and Volunteering in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse and Indigenous Communities](#).
- <sup>7</sup> Volunteering Involving Organisation (MIO) is an industry standard term used in Australia to describe an organisation which utilises volunteers as part of its workforce.
- <sup>8</sup> Volunteering Australia and PwC (2016), [State of Volunteering in Australia: Help Create Happiness](#).
- <sup>9</sup> For more information about this variable see ABS (2016), [2901.0 - Census of Population and Housing: Census Dictionary, 2016](#).
- <sup>10</sup> ABS (2016), *Census – Counting Persons, Place of Usual Residence*, TableBuilder.
- <sup>11</sup> ABS (2014), [General Social Survey 2014](#).
- <sup>12</sup> ABS (2018), *3417.0.55.001 - Microdata: Australian Census and Migrants Integrated Dataset, 2016*, Findings based on use of ABS TableBuilder data.
- <sup>13</sup> CIRCA for the Department of Social Services (2016) *Giving and Volunteering in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse and Indigenous Communities*
- <sup>14</sup> Hugo (2011).
- <sup>15</sup> Volunteering Australia and PwC (2016).
- <sup>16</sup> The 2019 GSS will include the following questions: whether informal voluntary work was undertaken in last 12 months, type of informal voluntary activity, who was assisted through this activity (e.g. family, friends, neighbours, community), and frequency of informal volunteering (e.g. once a week).
- <sup>17</sup> Department of Planning and Community Development (2012) *The economic value of volunteering in Victoria*
- <sup>18</sup> Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (2016) *Australian Charities Report*.
- <sup>19</sup> Department of Education, Skills and Employment (2019), [Demand for personal care workers growing](#).
- <sup>20</sup> AMES Australia internal database Volgistics
- <sup>21</sup> Volunteering Australia and PwC (2016).
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>23</sup> ABS (2016).
- <sup>24</sup> FECCA (2014), *Multicultural Access and Equity*. Canberra: Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia.
- <sup>25</sup> Dolnicar, S & Randle, M (2005) *Cultural Perceptions of Volunteering: Attracting Volunteers in an Increasingly Multicultural Society*, ANZMAC 2005 (CD).
- <sup>26</sup> Australian Emergency Management Institute (2011)
- <sup>27</sup> AMES (2012), *CALD Volunteer Engagement Project – Final Report*. Victorian Department of Planning and Community Development.
- <sup>28</sup> Examples include volunteering peak body Volunteering Victoria, Boroondara Volunteer Resource Centre, and national volunteer online portal GoVolunteer.
- <sup>29</sup> Hugo (2011).
- <sup>30</sup> Career Success Australia (2016), [Australia's hidden job market](#).
- <sup>31</sup> DHHS (2020), [Victoria's Volunteer Strategy](#), State Government of Victoria: Department of Health and Human Services.