Volunteering inclusion for people from CALD backgrounds

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The Volunteering Research Papers aim to capture evidence on a wide range of topics related to volunteering and outline key insights for policy and practice. The Volunteering Research Papers are peer reviewed, and insights will directly inform the development of the National Strategy for Volunteering.

The Volunteering Research Papers are an initiative of the National Strategy for Volunteering Research Working Group.

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Volunteering inclusion for people from CALD backgrounds

Carissa Jedwab[1]

Key Insights

- There is a strong social and economic case for building culturally and linguistically diverse[*] (CALD) communities' inclusion in structured forms of volunteering within organisations ('formal volunteering'). Positive benefits such as improved social and cultural integration has been shown to have direct correlation to successful settlement of new arrivals, as well as building confidence, English language skills, and practical experience within an Australian workplace. Volunteers also impart valuable cultural capital that is of benefit to individuals, groups and volunteer involving organisations.

- Data indicates there is a pattern of volunteering skewed towards certain migrant cohorts and/or settlement outcomes; they are more likely to have arrived as a skilled visa holder compared to other visa cohorts, be unemployed and seeking work, and be longer-term residents (i.e., not recent arrivals). All migrants – both recently arrived and non-recent - appear less likely to volunteer through an organisation than people born in Australia.

- Barriers to accessing formal volunteer positions are similar to those faced in the labour market; English language proficiency, local work experience, and logistical barriers such as access to transport and affordable childcare. Discriminatory attitudes from some organisations that are not open to the flexibility needed to accommodate cultural considerations for those from CALD backgrounds can be an obstacle to retaining these volunteers.

- Limited knowledge about volunteering is a major inclusion barrier for CALD communities. 'Formal volunteering' as understood in Australia is not a familiar concept in some languages or cultures, or the practice may look very different.

- Recruiting and supporting volunteers from CALD backgrounds can be a challenge for volunteer involving organisations; research suggests 86% of volunteer involving organisations need more volunteers but lack the resources to recruit people from CALD backgrounds.

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Introduction

Australia is a fast changing, culturally diverse nation. Recent figures indicate that there are over 7.6 million migrants living in Australia, accounting for 30% of the population that were born overseas.[2] The makeup of Australia's permanent Migration Program is also increasingly diverse; while those born in England continue to be the largest group of overseas-born residents, there has been an increase in migrants from countries such as India, China, Philippines, and Vietnam over the last decade. Recent arrivals through the Humanitarian program (refugees) originate from countries as diverse as Iraq, Myanmar, Afghanistan, Syria, and Eritrea, and many have had complex experiences of displacement and limited access to, or disrupted, education.[3]

Diverse groups such as new migrants are often at greater risk of social isolation and disadvantage in our community.[4] Refugees in particular experience greater socio-economic disadvantage in Australia than other migrant cohorts.[5] Volunteering generally can be a meaningful and enjoyable activity to increase social and community connections and engagement in civic and development activities for anyone who volunteers; the benefits specifically for people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds can be significant.[6]

While more likely to engage in 'informal', community-based forms of volunteering[7] also referred to as 'fluid volunteering',[8] or 'intra-community volunteering',[9] people from CALD backgrounds continue to experience barriers to structured volunteering opportunities within organisations (known as 'formal' volunteering).[10] This was highlighted in a recent Victorian report that found that only 30% of volunteer involving organisations had culturally diverse people as represented in their volunteer profile.[11]

AMES Australia (AMES) is an organisation that provides integrated settlement services, English language and vocational education, employment services, and social participation programs to diverse migrant and refugee communities across Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia, and Tasmania. AMES is an example of an organisation

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2   ABS, 2021
3   DHA, 2021; UNHCR, 2021
4   Ellis et al, 2020
5   Hugo, 2011
6   UN Volunteers, 2020
7   VA, 2007; CIRCA, 2016
8   Gapasin et al, 2021
9   Peucker, 2022
10   CIRCA, 2016; AMES 2020
11   Ellis et al, 2020

that also engages an extremely diverse cohort of volunteers; in 2020 AMES 500 plus volunteers were born in over 60 countries and collectively spoke nearly 70 languages. These volunteers provide valuable cultural and linguistic capital that enhances AMES settlement programs in roles that include English tutors, settlement accommodation volunteers, and customer service officers. With this long-term experience, there are a number of evidence-based inclusion strategies employed by AMES that can inform policy and practice implications across the wider volunteering ecosystem.

Implications of volunteering for CALD communities

While many of the benefits of volunteering apply to the broader community, they are particularly relevant for social inclusion and settlement for CALD communities.

For newly arrived migrants and refugees from CALD backgrounds, volunteering has been found to have direct positive benefits for physical and mental health, improved access to healthcare, and cultural and social integration outcomes. These factors have a direct correlation to successful settlement.[12] Volunteering in an Australian workplace can also build confidence, English language skills, and an understanding and experience of Australian workplace culture.[13]

Volunteering within ethno-religious community contexts can also have a range of positive effects on people's social networks, sense of belonging, identity, and self-confidence, as well as their civic-political awareness and engagement.[14] A recent Victorian-based study found that volunteers from CALD backgrounds take on a multitude of volunteering roles in the community; and has demonstrated that volunteering assisted Victorians who had been disproportionately affected by the pandemic, for example, through providing assistance to local communities and emergency services.[15] This supports the belief that in some communities, cultural expectations can lead many to see the volunteering work they are undertaking more as a community obligation, and not as 'formal' volunteering by industry definitions. This is reported to be a common perception amongst refugee groups, who often come from communal rather than individual cultures.[16]

In addition to the benefits imparted to volunteers, growing volunteerism within our diverse communities is of social and economic value to the wider community. Volunteers from CALD backgrounds bring valuable cultural capital (in the form of linguistic, cultural and/

12   VA, PWC, 2016
13   CIRCA, 2016; VA, SCOA, 2019; AMES, 2020
14   Peucker, 2022
15   Gapasin et al, 2021
16   Hugo, 2011

or intellectual skills) that can be used by individuals, groups, and volunteer involving organisations for financial or social gain.[17] A lived experience of being a migrant or a refugee to Australia also brings a human-centred, lived-experience dimension to volunteering that can support others from diverse backgrounds.

Volunteering participation rates amongst migrant cohorts

National data available on volunteering suggests that migrants – both recently arrived and non-recent - are less likely to volunteer through an organisation than people born in Australia.[18] However, there are a number of factors to consider with regard to different migrant cohorts and/or settlement outcomes when interpreting this data.

The Australian Census and Migrants Integrated dataset (ACMID), which links the Census with Permanent Migrant Settlement data from the Department of Home Affairs, suggests that there is a pattern of volunteering skewed towards certain migrant cohorts and/ or settlement outcomes. The characteristics of the migration intake and place-based opportunities appear to influence rates of volunteering amongst migrant groups (see Table 1 below). This data represents forms of volunteer work through an organisation or group.

Table 1: Volunteering amongst permanent migrants, key statistics from The Australian Census and Migrants Integrated dataset (ACMID).

Migrant status	Volunteers are more likely to have arrived through the Skilled visa stream (18.0%) than Family (13.6%) and Humanitarian streams (12.6%).
Employment status	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.
Index of socio-economic disadvantage	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%)

ACMID suggests that migrants who arrive through the Humanitarian visa stream (i.e., refugees) are less likely to volunteer than those who have arrived through the Skilled and Family visa streams. This may be because refugees are known to have greater challenges with settlement; in particular housing, employment, health, and social connections, compared to other categories of Australia's migrant intake despite their

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17   Ellis et al, 2020
18   ABS GSS, 2020

great determination to overcome these barriers.[19] Refugees often have disrupted pre-arrival education and English language learning experiences. In contrast, the English language skills and/or qualifications of Skilled and Family visa migrant cohorts are often tied to the conditions of their visa, which may help to facilitate stronger access to volunteering.

ACMID suggests that employment status may influence the likelihood of a migrant engaging in volunteering; migrants who were unemployed (not working but seeking work) reported higher rates of volunteering than those already engaged in work. Labour market underutilisation is a commonly cited problem in Australian research, particularly for refugees.[20] New migrants can experience difficulties obtaining their first job in Australia due to a lack of local work experience or references; and may see volunteering as a pathway to employment. In contrast, within the broader community, people employed part-time and full-time (34% and 30%) are more likely to volunteer than those who are unemployed (23%).[21]

A longer time in Australia may also translate to higher rates of volunteering amongst migrant groups. Data from the General Social Survey (GSS) indicates that recent migrants and temporary residents (defined as having lived in Australia for less than ten years) are less likely to have undertaken voluntary work through an organisation in the last 12 months (15%) than migrants who had been in Australia longer (i.e., non-recent migrants) (22%) and people born in Australia (27%).[22]

Barriers to volunteering inclusion and the impact of COVID-19

Limited knowledge about volunteering is a major inclusion barrier in CALD communities, particularly amongst recent arrivals. Often the concept of 'formal volunteering' as understood in Australia does not translate into the languages and cultural origins of CALD communities or the practice may look very different (for example, informal unpaid help).[23] National consultation with CALD communities has identified that volunteering continues to be an 'alien concept' within some communities.[24] Another study found that perceptions of volunteering and volunteering organisations varied widely across different CALD groups, for example, experiences in countries of origin (such as negative

19   Hugo, 2011
20   Hugo, 2011
21   ABS, 2019
22   ABS, 2020
23   AMES, 2020
24   FECCA, 2014

experiences with state institutions) can also impact on preparedness to volunteer in formal organisations.[25]

Other barriers in accessing formal volunteer positions are similar to those experienced within the labour market. This typically includes language and cultural barriers; where lower English language proficiency can be a potential barrier for volunteers when training and day-to-day operations are in English. Logistical barriers such as transport (in the absence of a car or familiarity with using public transport) and childcare responsibilities (in the absence of family to assist with childcare, affordable childcare access, and/or a reluctance to leave children in the care of strangers) may also inhibit engagement in volunteering.[26] Research has also identified discriminatory attitudes from some organisations that are not open to changes in procedures and the flexibility needed to accommodate cultural considerations for those from CALD backgrounds can be an obstacle to retaining these volunteers.[27]

Further, there has been a significant drop (11%) in volunteering rates amongst recent migrants and temporary residents since the last GSS was administered in 2014. These groups were largely excluded from state-funded relief payments such as *Jobkeeper* and *Jobseeker* during the pandemic. The impoverishment of many temporary migrants living in Australia became quickly evident as casual and part-time work in service sectors experienced large job losses.[28] As a result, volunteering may not have been a viable option for many during this period. Despite early research suggesting that volunteering work was impacted more severely by the recession than paid work this has received little research attention to date.[29]

Considering the known disadvantages experienced by migrants regarding employment and volunteering inclusion, little is known about their participation in volunteering in volunteer involving organisations during the pandemic. An AMES volunteer from Burma who arrived in Australia in the 1960s shares his experience:

"I help to provide local orientation and English tutoring to other Burmese refugees. I found it difficult to volunteer in Melbourne during the lockdown restrictions, however once I was familiar with the technology it provided a vital avenue to reconnect with people. I was able to hold one-on-one and small group conversations over Zoom. It was good to be able to connect with people and provide some support, but it was not the same as meeting people in person. One of the issues was that some newly arrived people didn't have access to digital devices."

25   AMEI, 2011
26   AMES, 2020
27   Gapasin et al, 2021
28   Unions NSW, 2020
29   VA, 2021

Recruiting and supporting volunteers from CALD backgrounds can be a challenge for volunteer involving organisations

People from CALD backgrounds can face difficulties connecting with volunteer involving organisations, especially if the organisations lack appropriate recruitment information, training or resources. Volunteer involving organisations may also not have adaptable and flexible volunteer management practices to effectively engage CALD volunteers. Crucially, there may be inadequate cultural awareness or limited culturally appropriate information to support engaging and sustaining CALD individuals in mainstream volunteering roles.[30]

Mainstream organisations may also have a reactive rather than proactive approach to recruitment of volunteers from diverse backgrounds, for example when community engagement to raise awareness about volunteering opportunities is unrepresentative of a culturally diverse audience. Organisations may also hold discriminatory attitudes as mentioned above.[31] A survey of 661 volunteer involving organisations identified that 86% needed more volunteers but these organisations lacked the resources to recruit certain groups such as people from CALD backgrounds.[32]

Policy and Practice implications

Volunteer involving organisations seeking to build inclusion of people from CALD backgrounds in formal volunteer roles may look to adopting evidence-based strategies employed by volunteer involving organisations such as AMES. Policymakers and the volunteering ecosystem can support volunteer involving organisations through education and resourcing to implement and evaluate these inclusion strategies:

1. Volunteer involving organisations could review their volunteer recruitment processes with a view to increasing the flexibility of, and access to, their volunteer positions. Building cultural awareness within volunteer involving organisations and developing culturally appropriate resources will provide a proactive and sustained approach to engagement with CALD individuals in mainstream formal volunteering roles. For example, AMES runs information sessions on its volunteering programs supported by community liaisons who provide cultural and language support.

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30   AMES, 2020
31   Gapasin et al, 2021
32   VA, PwC 2016

2. If volunteers from CALD backgrounds intend to volunteer as a pathway to paid employment, volunteer involving organisations should support them to maximise the employment-related learnings gained through volunteering. Professional networking opportunities available through volunteering increase the likelihood that CALD individuals learn about job vacancies or gain valuable advice on career pathways. They can also be supported to identify and use transferrable skills gained through volunteering, such as data entry and customer service. For example, AMES undertakes a number of meaningful activities with its volunteers such as resume writing workshops as a value-add to its volunteer programs.

3. Volunteers from CALD backgrounds must be empowered to volunteer safely within the volunteering ecosystem and volunteer involving organisations. Accessible education on volunteer rights and responsibilities is essential to achieving this. For example, AMES provides a 'volunteer work experience' program designed to provide CALD volunteers with Australian work experience over a set period of time (12 days). Volunteers are provided with a clear job description, induction and training, and ongoing mentoring. This helps to build the volunteers' confidence and cultural safety within organisations by providing any necessary adjustments/accommodations. On completion, volunteers participate in an exit interview to assess their progress and further aspirations.

Gaps in knowledge and future research possibilities

Inclusion of volunteers from CALD backgrounds in 'formal', structured volunteering within volunteer involving organisations remains under-researched. While there are some initial insights as to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the volunteering sector, little is known about the experiences of volunteers from CALD backgrounds, including those seeking volunteering opportunities within mainstream volunteer involving organisations during this time. Considering the disadvantages experienced in accessing employment and in social isolation, in particular by temporary residents and new migrants, this should receive further research attention. The volunteering ecosystem would also benefit from further inquiry into the impact on volunteer involving organisations in how they recruit and support volunteers from CALD backgrounds, which may have undergone significant transformation during this period.

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Endnotes

* The term 'cultural and linguistic diversity' with the associated acronym 'CALD' is currently used within Australian government, the private sector, and in research and academic institutions to describe populations other than the Anglo-Celtic majority. It is therefore the term chosen for this use in this paper.