



state of  
**volunteering**  
in VICTORIA

# Snapshot: **CALD**

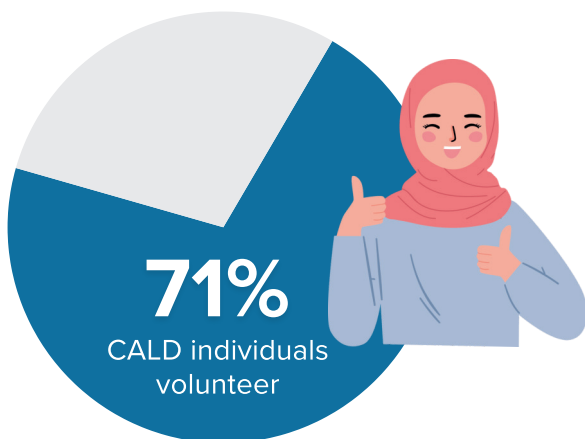
*Culturally and Linguistically Diverse*



# Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD)\*

## At a glance

This section describes volunteering as it occurred in Victoria in the 12 months prior to August 2024, as reported in the survey of Victorian residents.

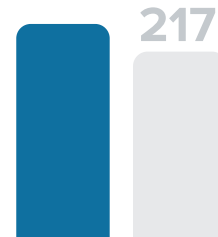
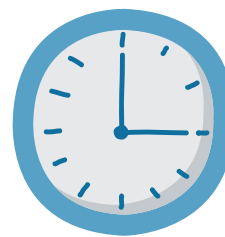


Above statewide average (58.9%)

### Key motivations:

- ★ Use their skills & experience **(40.8%)**
- ★ Give back to those who helped them **(34.9%)**
- ★ Support or learn more about a cause **(29.6%)**

**234** hours contributed per year

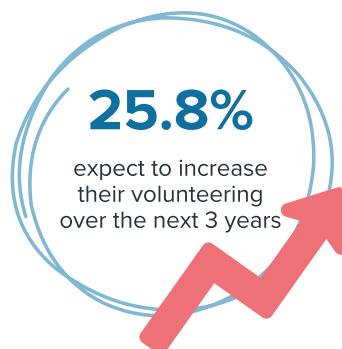


### Key barriers:

- ✗ Work or study commitments **(50.5%)**
- ✗ Family responsibilities **(44.6%)**
- ✗ Income, costs or expenses **(38.0%)**
- ✗ Lack of transport **(24.0%)**

**\$409.38**  
Average out-of-pocket expenses per year

More than double the average for non-CALD volunteers (\$173.45)



### Key pathways into volunteering:

- 🔓 Social media **(37.0%)**
- 🔓 Google / searching online **(24.0%)**
- 🔓 Professional referral **(21.9%)**
- 🔓 Online recruitment sites **(21.4%)**

\*CALD = Individuals or groups who identify with different cultural backgrounds, languages, and traditions.

In the survey, CALD status was determined by whether respondents reported using a language other than English at home, alongside a question on cultural identity.

## CALD volunteers are deeply connected to community

For people from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background, volunteering is not just a task or activity, but a **powerful expression of identity, belonging, and shared responsibility**.

Participants spoke of volunteering as an act **deeply embedded in cultural and spiritual life**, rooted in traditions of collective care and reciprocity. While Western volunteering models often emphasise formal roles and structured hours, many CALD volunteers see service as embedded in everyday life.

In some cultures, there isn't even a direct translation for volunteering in their first language – not because the concept doesn't exist, but because it is woven into everyday life.

“In Iraq there is no term for volunteering – helping is just part of the community.”

“Volunteering is one of the ways to assist new migrants with English and to settle into a new place.”

“While volunteering is something we all do, it almost seems like it's just a word. It's our way of life. It's about seeing people in need, seeing communities in need, and going: what can I do as a person to help?”

CALD volunteers are highly active contributors across Victoria. Their participation rate is well above average (**71%** compared with the statewide figure of 58.9%). They also contribute more time overall - an average of **234 hours** per year, compared with 217 for non-CALD volunteers.

## Motivations and benefits

CALD volunteers are highly motivated by gratitude, learning, and community connection.

Their reasons for volunteering often reflect a strong sense of reciprocity or sense of cultural responsibility and tradition. While 'helping others' was the most common motivation (**58.4%**), many CALD participants also emphasised:

- » Using their skills and experience (**40.8%**)
- » Giving back to those who had supported them (**34.9%**)
- » Supporting or learning more about a cause (**29.6%**)

This highlights that CALD volunteering is often shaped by lived experience – with motivations tied

to growth, belonging, and giving back to the wider community, rather than being driven solely by leisure or personal interest.

Volunteering also provides an important pathway into community life. Many CALD participants volunteer to gain skills and experience (**35.7%**) and build professional networks (**21.2%**) that may lead to employment or study opportunities.

Importantly, CALD engagement is not necessarily confined to their immediate community. Compared to non-CALD cohorts, CALD volunteers are more likely to participate online (**26.3%**) or in roles beyond their local area, including elsewhere in Victoria (**12.7%**), across Australia (**6.9%**), and overseas (**7.7%**).

This shows the value of volunteering for building local connections, but also maintaining broader cultural and transnational ties.

## Recruitment pathways

Compared to non-CALD peers, CALD volunteers are more likely to find opportunities through digital and formal channels.

Social media (**37.0%**), SEEK Volunteer or other similar recruitment platforms (**21.4%**), and Google search (**24.0%**) were commonly cited. Professional referrals (**21.9%**) and Volunteer Resource Centres (**19.4%**) also play an important role in connecting CALD individuals with roles.

This pattern highlights the value of accessible online platforms and structured referrals, particularly for

those new to Australia who may have fewer informal networks to rely on.

The findings reinforce that a one-size-fits-all approach to recruitment is unlikely to succeed. Building strong referral relationships with community, health, and settlement services is vital, as is ensuring clear visibility in digital spaces.

Importantly, these pathways also reflect the importance of trust – CALD volunteers are more likely to engage when an opportunity is endorsed or facilitated through a trusted source.

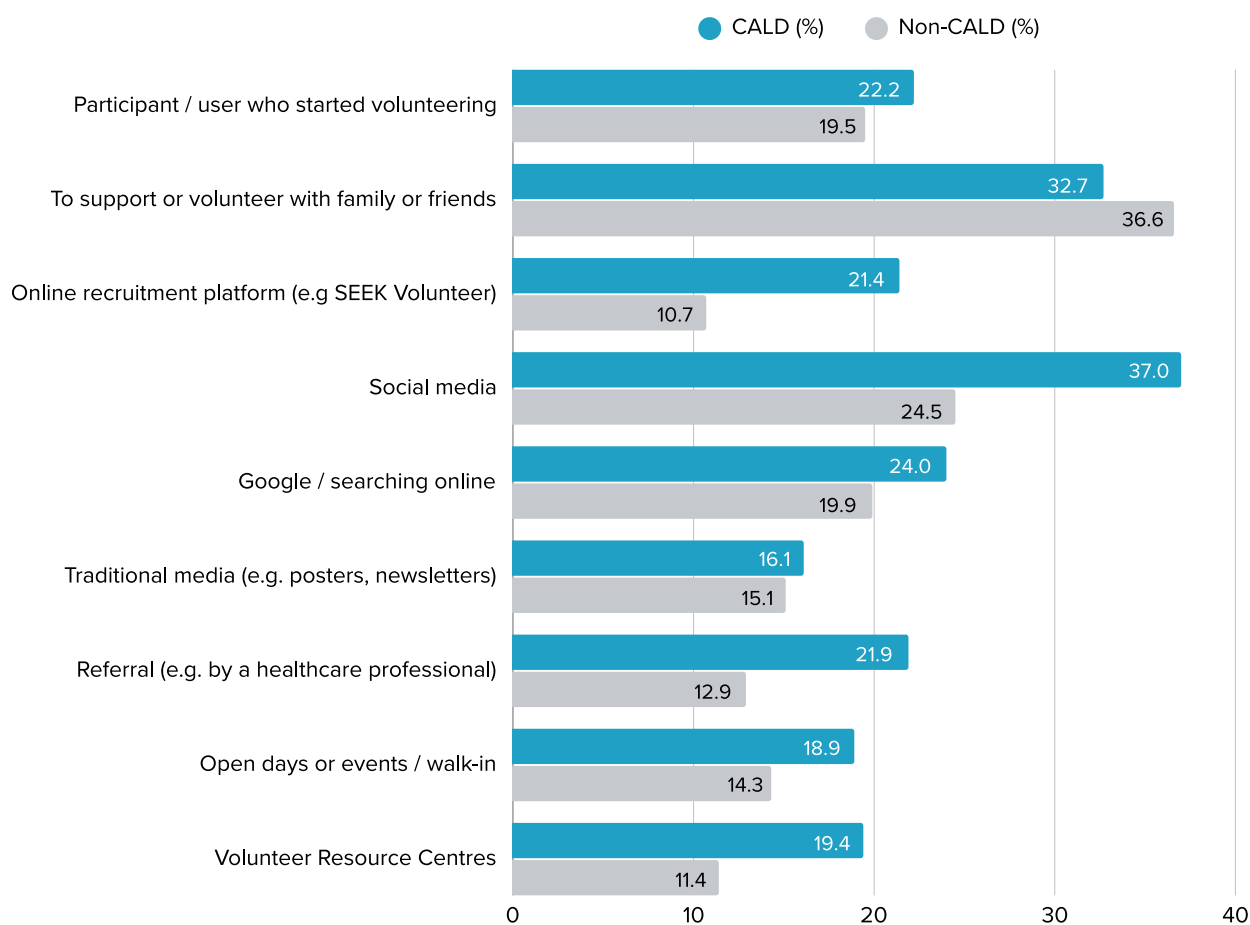


Figure 1: Recruitment Route by CALD Status

## Challenges across society are also challenges in volunteering

Despite a strong willingness to volunteer, participants from CALD backgrounds face multiple and intersecting barriers.

These include **visa-related restrictions**, **unfamiliar compliance processes**, and a **lack of culturally responsive practices** within Volunteer-Involving Organisations.

Rigid role structures, limited flexibility for cultural or caregiving obligations, and a lack of understanding about different community norms were also identified as obstacles.

“They really want to do volunteering, but they have visa issues and they haven't settled enough. So that's a barrier for them to participate.”

CALD volunteers also face higher financial burdens. On average, they reported **\$409 in out-of-pocket costs each year** – more than double that of non-CALD volunteers. This included higher expenses across almost every category, from transport and uniforms to training and childcare.

Many also reported experiences of **racism, cultural bias, and discrimination**. These experiences shape their sense of belonging, confidence, and willingness to continue engaging.

“Sometimes just looking a certain way or belonging to a certain religion makes people treat you differently.”

When asked “Have you recently reduce your time or stopped volunteering?”, significantly more CALD volunteers (**41.8%**) reported cutting back compared with the non-CALD rate of 26.1%.

## Building inclusion and looking ahead

What's clear is that inclusion is not just about access – it is also about culture. Volunteers want to be welcomed for **who they are**, not just what they can contribute.

Building safe, affirming, and culturally responsive volunteering environments requires a sustained effort.

Despite the challenges, CALD communities continue to show resilience, with many volunteers appearing optimistic about their ongoing involvement.

Nearly half (**47.4%**) said they expect to continue volunteering at about the same level, and **25.8%** plan to increase their participation, slightly more than non-CALD respondents (21.4%).

“It’s a long road, but it’s worth it. We’re building trust and showing people they are welcome.”



# Summary

CALD volunteers play a vital role in community life across the state.

They bring with them unique practices, languages, and perspectives that enrich volunteering, ensuring it reflects the full breadth of Victoria's diverse communities.

For many in CALD communities, **volunteering is not simply a role, but part of a cultural tradition of reciprocity and care**, where helping others is woven into everyday life.

“CALD communities take responsibility really seriously... if they commit, they follow through.”

To better support CALD volunteers and ensure greater inclusion, volunteering needs to adapt by:

- » Reducing financial burdens by improving reimbursement access and offsetting high participation costs.
- » Strengthening access pathways by providing more transport options, culturally responsive onboarding, and flexible role structures.
- » Investing in culturally safe volunteering environments, where inclusion goes beyond access to genuinely affirm identity, language, and community values.
- » Recognising and valuing informal and culturally embedded volunteering, not just formal registered hours.
- » Building trust-based partnerships with CALD communities, focusing on co-designing volunteer roles and leadership opportunities.

## More insights:

Volunteering Victoria (2025), *Common Misconceptions for Newly Arrived Migrants*

<https://www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au/resource/newly-arrived-migrants-common-misconceptions>

National Knowledge Base, *Engaging Newly Arrived Migrants*

<https://volunteering.freshdesk.com/support/solutions/articles/51000307073-engaging-newly-arrived-migrants>

