



# Barriers to Volunteering Newly Arrived Migrants

In 2023, all volunteering peak bodies commissioned a report to identify barriers to volunteering and how to improve access and inclusion for First Nations people, people with disability, and newly arrived migrants. We have created a snapshot series to share the key findings, so volunteer-involving organisations feel equipped to engage volunteers from each group.

Please note, the language used in these snapshots follows the Australian Government's style manual. However, language is always evolving and varies by region. Always check with local peak bodies and relevant agencies in your area for the most appropriate language.

## Who are newly arrived migrants?

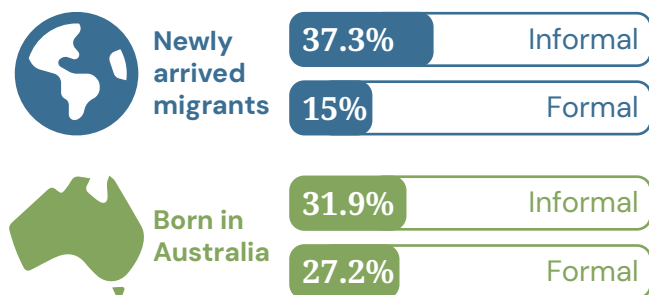
Newly arrived migrants are defined as those who have lived in Australia for less than 5 years, arriving through various visa pathways. They join an increasing cohort of Australians born overseas, which now comprises almost 30% of the Australian population.

## Migration and volunteering

Migration plays a big role in helping Australia tackle demographic challenges, like an ageing population and declining birth rate. Migrants help to address labour shortages in industries such as healthcare, agriculture, and hospitality.

Migrants often volunteer informally, reflecting their cultural practice of supporting family and community.

Volunteering can be a key factor in helping newly arrived migrants to integrate into their new communities:



## Barriers to volunteering

- Lack of understanding of the term “volunteering” in a Western context.
- Unsure how to find suitable roles and start formal volunteering.
- Overly complicated administrative processes and costs such as police checks and registration fees.
- Limited time due to paid work, study, and caregiving responsibilities.
- Lack of existing networks and social connections.
- Potential past experiences of trauma, discrimination or racism.
- Low levels of English proficiency and digital literacy.
- Inaccessible and non-inclusive volunteering programs, as well as conscious and unconscious bias against recruiting migrants.

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## Key insight

In collectivist cultures, the emphasis on community and family often leads to high levels of informal volunteering. Activities are usually driven by a sense of duty and interconnectedness rather than formal recognition.

*"[Volunteering] is a gateway to belong to the community."*

- Interviewee

## Recommendations:



1. **Don't make assumptions:** Avoid stereotypes and assumptions about different cultural backgrounds. Treat each person as an individual, with unique experiences, skills and needs.



2. **Educate your team:** Provide cultural awareness training for staff, board members and volunteers. For example, recognise the importance of community leaders in many migrant cultures.



3. **Use plain English:** Keep communication simple and use plain English, including images to support understanding.



4. **Offer flexible roles:** Offer flexible volunteering roles that can fit around other commitments, considering remote and short-term opportunities.



5. **Promote diversity:** Use culturally diverse images and promote your roles in places where newly arrived migrants gather, like public libraries and migrant resource centres.



6. **Connect with local groups:** Strengthen relationships with local multicultural groups and leaders to connect with their communities.



7. **Create a welcoming environment:** Review your policies, simplify your induction, and provide mentors or buddies from similar cultural backgrounds to ensure a welcoming experience.

## For more support

Visit the [Knowledge Base](#) or your volunteering peak body website for helpful advice, information, and insights on engaging newly arrived migrants.

## Learn more

[National Knowledge Base: Engaging Newly Arrived Migrants](#)



The seven State and Territory volunteering peak bodies acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea, and community. We pay our respect to Elders past and present.

Funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services.



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