



Insights Report

Understanding the diversity of consumers and their experiences of the energy system

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Consumers Edition

April 2024



Foreword

As the national voice for Australian energy consumers, Energy Consumers Australia (ECA) works to ensure that the decision-makers – government, regulators and industry - understand and are responding to the needs of Australian households and small business energy consumers.

Our research has consistently shown that people have different motivations, opportunities and ability to take part in the energy market, or to engage in the transition to a net zero energy system. Our work has demonstrated the importance and incredible value of designing for that diversity - ensuring that energy policies, programs, products and services are tailored to the actual needs of the people using them.

We were therefore very excited to enter into partnership with Sydney Community Forum's Voices for Power. People from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds living in Australia represent around a quarter of Australians. Like everyone, they contribute to our society and economic prosperity but in energy terms are often marginalised or considered 'hard to reach'.

This report outlines the findings of our partnership—we called it a Deep Dive—with Sydney Community Forum. It details the complex challenges facing CALD consumers that we uncovered in our desktop research and through our workshops with the Voices for Power leaders.

We show in this report that while some of the barriers they face in accessing affordable energy services and taking part in Australia's energy transition are shared with other energy consumers, CALD households are more likely to face these barriers than non-CALD people, and can experience additional and compounding barriers.

Our discussions in this Deep Dive directly with CALD consumers has also revealed opportunities to address those challenges. We have recommended a range of solutions that will ensure CALD households have access to affordable, reliable and clean energy. Those require responses from government and industry.

We thank Asha and Nirmal from Sydney Community Forum, and the Voices for Power community leaders who worked with us on this Deep Dive, and for sharing their knowledge with us. This was our first Deep Dive – we hope that future partnerships will be as enjoyable and inspiring a journey as this has been for ECA.

Brendan French
Chief Executive Officer
Energy Consumers Australia



Sydney Community Forum has led the Sydney migrant community's advocacy for access to clean, affordable energy for all through Voices for Power (VfP) since 2016. VfP is a migrant community-led climate justice and energy equity initiative of the Sydney Alliance—a coalition of civil society organisations working towards the common good of this city.

Our work is grounded in the values and practices of a relational culture built on mutual respect and trust, and action oriented on shared issues and concerns. In practice, it means we put time and energy to build trust with migrant community and faith leaders in Western and South-Western Sydney to establish cultural safety so we can listen deeply and widely to these communities about their climate and energy-related concerns and issues.

What we heard from over two thousand CALD people is: migrant communities face significant barriers to engage effectively with the energy system. These barriers are structural in origin – technological, language and knowledge gaps of Australia's complex energy system, coupled with socio-economic disadvantage and competing priorities. All contributing towards CALD communities' marginalisation from meaningful engagement with the energy system and exclusion from decision making and policy development discussions.

Current thinking and programs designed to facilitate CALD community engagement in the energy transition are not culturally safe or responsive to the needs and priorities of this cohort. Initiatives such as translating existing energy resources into community languages are not the tools or indicators of effective engagement. There is no guarantee that migrant community members are literate in their own language, and if they are, this is still the least effective tool for communicating with most migrant communities. They tell us their trusted sources of information come through their family, community and faith networks, and we need to take note of this when designing and implementing energy programs and initiatives targeting CALD communities.

The Deep Dive process has given our CALD community leaders the opportunity to speak directly and powerfully to ECA through the workshops, and to the key stakeholders in the Energy and Climate sector through this Insights Report. SCF and ECA went deeper and wider in the migrant communities of Western Sydney to surface the stories of lived experience and energy poverty to develop the evidence base for advocacy and input into more inclusive policy and decision-making processes. It also supported our ongoing effort to build CALD leaders so they can engage in advocacy and negotiate with decision makers on their communities' energy and climate related priorities.

Asha Ramzan
Executive Officer
Sydney Community Forum



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Executive summary

Between 7 and 28 February 2024, Energy Consumers Australia (ECA) and Sydney Community Forum (SCF) ran three workshops with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) community leaders. The structure and approach of the workshops was grounded in desktop research into the existing evidence base on the experience of CALD consumers in the Australian energy market, including ECA's annual energy consumer surveys, SCF's recent membership survey and the Queensland University of Technology (QUT)'s [toolkit](#) to inform better engagement with CALD consumers¹.

Emerging from that dialogue with CALD community leaders are four key areas for action - practical recommendations for governments and industry to address the main barriers faced by CALD households in this energy transition.

These recommendations reflect the priorities identified by CALD community leaders, and which are strongly endorsed by ECA and SCF.

The report also outlines a number of other good ideas for improvement, some targeting specific issues, which are further detailed in the report.

Area for action: 1) Providing empathetic and accessible support through peers

Australia's many migrant community associations and local networks are an underutilised but powerful and trusted channel that could promote engagement, inform and educate, and build relationships with CALD consumers to help them solve their problems now and through the energy transition.

CALD households are less confident that they know about the actions they can take to manage their energy usage, find it harder to locate and understand energy-related information, and are more likely than non-CALD consumers to agree that it takes too much effort to make changes and make their homes more energy efficient to reduce energy costs. The barriers they face, and the lack of appropriate support, leads to mistrust and scepticism.

Strengthening CALD engagement and education through grassroots organisations can provide safe and trusted spaces for community members to share their concerns, build their confidence to take part in the journey to net zero, and provide partners for industry and government to co-design solutions. Sustained community education and place-based engagement also build leadership and advocacy skills, supporting more diverse representation in energy decision making processes.



RECOMMENDATION 1:

That the Commonwealth Government fund a pilot mobile Community Energy Hub in Western Sydney.

The Commonwealth Government should pilot a mobile Community Energy Hub with Sydney Community Forum by December 2024. This model of 'one-stop-shop' works for migrant communities; if successful, it should be rolled out in other regions, States and Territories. A mobile Community Energy Hub would:

- ✓ provide education in language and culturally appropriate ways,
- ✓ promote place-based engagement to support active participation in the transition, and
- ✓ encourage more diverse representation in energy decision-making processes.

Area for action: 2) Industry and regulator to work with CALD leaders to deliver information and assistance

Information received through energy bills is too complex, difficult to make sense of, and fails to offer insights to prompt behaviour change. The lack of in-language and culturally sensitive materials hinders people's ability to make well-informed decisions and can result in CALD consumers missing out on

¹ Gordon R., Badejo F., Harada T. (2023). [Supporting CALD Australians to be empowered energy consumers – Toolkit of recommendations](#). QUT Faculty of Business and Law – School of Advertising, Marketing and Public Relations.

energy-saving opportunities. The use of estimated bills emerged as a particular pain point, undermining people's trust in the energy market.

Lower levels of English proficiency and cultural differences can add an additional layer of structural disadvantage, compounding already—and sometimes creating—inadequate access to resources and exacerbating vulnerability. People who have lower levels of proficiency in spoken English also have lower levels of income compared to those with higher proficiency in English. We heard that interactions with energy retailers are too often problematic: difficulties in securing an interpreter, or getting useful information in language, was a repeated concern.

We see an opportunity for industry and the energy regulator to work with the CALD community to directly address these barriers.



RECOMMENDATION 2:

That the Australian Energy Council and the Australian Energy Regulator partner with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) community groups to improve the quality of information and assistance for CALD consumers.

2A: The Australian Energy Council, as peak industry body representing energy retailers, should

- ✓ review and update its 2021 [Best Practice Resources for Energy Retailer Assistance](#)
- ✓ establish a CALD Partners Group to improve their engagement, increase retailers' bilingual recruitment and cultural competency, and grow their capacity to reach CALD consumers through trusted voices and channels.

2B: That the Australian Energy Regulator should

- ✓ As part of its [Compliance & Enforcement Priorities for 2024](#), encourage energy retailers and service providers to provide interpreter services within 24 hours of initial contact and at a time that suits the consumer.
- ✓ Partner with more CALD community groups to co-design its next iteration of the [Better Bills Guideline](#), including very clear, visual communication.

Area for action: 3) Ensure CALD consumers are living in healthy, comfortable and energy efficient homes.

CALD people are more likely to be renting and living in apartments and share households. Our research shows that lower incomes, renters and those living in multi-unit dwellings are at greater risk of being left behind in the energy transition and face significant challenges in accessing the energy services they need to prosper and thrive at an affordable cost.

There is a need for governments to address the particular barriers faced by CALD consumers, to ensure their homes aren't adding to their energy bills or affecting their health and wellbeing. The workshop singled out housing as an important priority.



RECOMMENDATION 3:

Federal, State and Territory governments to advance housing reforms to improve the energy efficiency of ALL Australian homes.

3A: That State Governments

- ✓ Mandate disclosure at point of advertisement (lease and sale) by real estate agents of a home's energy efficiency rating and its likely average annual energy costs;
- ✓ Require all new builds and major renovations to be energy efficient and all electric, with all existing homes to have a clear target to reach at least a 7-star rating (in NatHERS) and all electric by 2030;
- ✓ Establish and enforce minimum energy efficiency standards for rental properties that gradually increase to a minimum of 7-star rating (in NatHERS) and all electric by 2030;

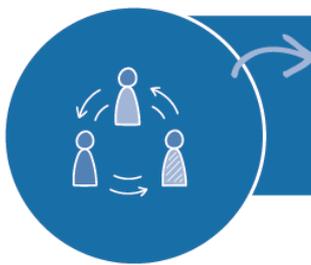
3B: That Federal, State and Territory governments work together in the 2024 update to the [Trajectory for Low Energy Buildings](#) to develop a roadmap to upgrade all rental properties, with set targets forbidding the rental of unhealthy and inefficient homes, with applicable penalties for landlords who do not comply.

Area for action: 4) that Australian Federal, State and Territory Governments are helping CALD households decarbonise

Like all Australians, CALD consumers are being asked to take action to help with the transition to a net zero energy system to address the potential harm of climate change. That is happening at a time when cost of living increases and rising energy prices are forcing more people into financial stress.

In the past 12 months, affordability worsened across most jurisdictions, particularly for low-income households. The proportion of residential customers with energy debt is currently at its highest level in the past five years. The overall proportion of electricity customers on hardship programs is also at its highest level in the past 5 years, and the number of electricity and gas customers exiting hardship programs continued to decline in 2022–23.

CALD consumers want to see the three levels of government partner with CALD communities to deliver accessible and tailored programs to support decarbonisation efforts and lower bills for households that need it most but can't do it on their own.



RECOMMENDATION 4:

All three levels of government to provide practical and targeted assistance to help decarbonise and lower energy bills, particularly for those least able to do it on their own.

As part of the consumer-focused reform package announced by the Energy and Climate Change Ministerial Council on 1 March 2024, the Federal and State governments should work together to:

- ✓ Provide free energy audits for low-income / cash-poor households.
- ✓ Fund local councils to provide financial incentives and/or council rate discounts for community bulk solar rooftop purchases.

Table 1 - Key recommendations from the Deep Dive with CALD consumers

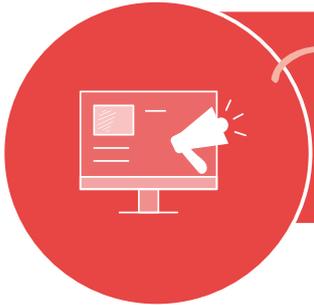


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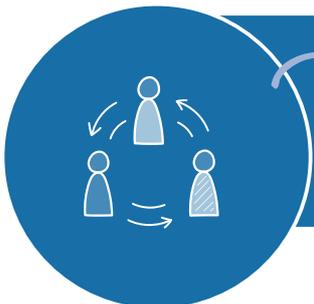
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Introduction

ECA's research has consistently indicated that vulnerability in the energy system is contextual, not inherent. This means it can be caused by the complexity of our energy market in transition, or by the individual circumstances of consumers and households. Our research indicates that the solutions to overcome those barriers must be tailored to the needs of consumers.

ECA's [December 2023 Energy Consumer Sentiment Survey \(ECSS\)](#) suggests that at least 82% of Australian households are likely to face one or more barriers to accessing efficient, reliable, and affordable energy services. And that some people are likely to face higher barriers than others.

CALD households can experience structural and systemic socio-economic disadvantages, such as employment discrimination, housing insecurity, social isolation, and limited access to social services. Without holistic intervention to address these barriers, they are also at risk of being left behind in the transition to a net zero future². It is essential that governments and industry implement strategies – for policies, programs and services – that promote inclusivity and equity.

In 2023, researchers from the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) developed [evidence-based recommendations for better engagement and communication with CALD consumers](#)³ with funding from ECA. They developed a toolkit for government and industry, and recommended that decision-makers adopt an ethics of care perspective with adequate customer care provision, culturally sensitive and appropriate language, framing and messaging, and an intersectional lens to acknowledge how factors such as race, gender, ethnicity, and disability, as well as complex experiences and past histories, intersect creating privilege and oppression. Refer to Appendix 1 for details on the study findings and specific guidance for the energy industry.

ECA and SCF partnered on a Deep Dive⁴ to better understand what these recommendations mean, how they can be successfully implemented, and how they may change day-to-day interactions and services in the energy sector. We also wanted to understand the additional barriers CALD consumers face, where and how they encounter exclusionary practices and discrimination, and to work with CALD leaders to develop solutions. The insights from this Deep Dive provide an evidence base for stronger advocacy by SCF and ECA and will help both our organisations work to develop more inclusive decision-making processes.

Supported by foundational desktop research, this investigation took a deep qualitative approach, as such insights specific to CALD energy consumers are still scarce (see Box 1 for clarification on how we define CALD energy consumers and Appendix 2 for our detailed Deep Dive methodology).

Through three phases of engagement, we held workshops with 47 Voices for Power CALD community leaders in Sydney and asked them about their experiences and, more broadly, the experiences of the communities they represent of the energy market and renewable transition. For the last seven years, this group of leaders has been listening to migrant communities across Sydney and advocating for equitable access to clean and affordable energy through the Voices for Power project.

Throughout this Deep Dive, we created a safe and respectful space for sharing and collaboration to happen among CALD participants. We learned from peoples' expertise and lived experience and discussed their emerging issues and concerns. We have endeavoured to synthesise their vision of what an inclusive energy future could look like and capture the solutions they believe would make the energy system more equitable and accessible for CALD people. This is what they want to see:

² See, for example, ECA's [Understanding the Energy Divide](#) Explainer (2023) and previous research conducted by [Ethnic Communities' Council of NSW](#) on the experiences and concerns of CALD energy consumers and businesses in NSW (2016).

³ Gordon R., Badejo F., Harada T. (2023). [Supporting CALD Australians to be empowered energy consumers – Toolkit of recommendations](#). QUT Faculty of Business and Law – School of Advertising, Marketing and Public Relations.

⁴ Alignment between the Deep Dive insights and the QUT researchers' recommendations are also included in Appendix 1.

1. **An empowering net zero journey for all:** CALD consumers want to have agency and feel supported to take action in Australia's net zero journey through a transition narrative that reflects their priorities, needs, concerns and values.
2. **Action-oriented and clear communications from industry:** CALD energy consumers must be provided with easy-to-understand and relevant information through their bills and interactions with energy service providers to support energy costs monitoring, energy efficiency measures, and smarter management of energy consumption.
3. **Empathetic and accessible support through peers:** CALD consumers must be able to access the services, information and support they need in a language they prefer through the sources they trust.
4. **Government collaboration for decarbonisation:** CALD consumers want to see the three levels of government partner with CALD communities to deliver accessible and tailored programs to support decarbonisation efforts, lower bills and contribute to more resilient communities.

We have structured this report around these key outcome statements. We believe that the benefits of an inclusive, affordable and equitable energy future for CALD energy consumers will extend beyond the energy market, positively impacting health, wellbeing and socioeconomic development.

Box 1 – How we define CALD energy consumers

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) introduced the term Cultural and Linguistic Diversity in 1999 to capture the unique characteristics of Australia's increasingly multicultural communities. To this date, there is no consensus on what culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) means. As noted by the [Australian Institute of Health and Welfare](#):

cultural and linguistic diversity can encompass a range of aspects including a person's country of birth, their ancestry, where their parents were born, what language/s they speak, and their religious affiliation.

According to the 2021 Census, 3 in 10 (28%) people living in Australia were born overseas, with people born in nearly every country of the world. 5.8 million people (22.8%) speak a language other than English at home (over 300 different languages), with 15% of these speaking English not well or not at all and facing significant barriers to participate in society (ABS 2021, [Cultural diversity: Census](#)).

For this report, excluding our Deep Dive insights, we refer to existing qualitative research with CALD consumers, including the research of ECA. This has been highlighted and appropriately cited.

We also draw on secondary quantitative data for proficiency in spoken English, language other than English spoken at home, and country of birth to analyse CALD energy consumers' experiences. We acknowledge and emphasise the complexities of using such definitions when devising CALD engagement, as personal affiliations to language, culture and community are fluid and cannot be captured within singular definitions.

An empowering net zero journey for all

CALD consumers want to have agency and feel supported to take action in Australia’s net zero journey through an energy transition narrative that reflects their priorities, needs, concerns and values.

ECA’s research – most recently [Energy Consumer Sentiment and Behaviour Surveys](#) and [Stepping Up Report](#) – makes it clear that people on lower incomes, renters and those living in multi-unit dwellings are at greater risk of being left behind in the energy transition and face significant challenges in accessing the energy services they need to prosper and thrive at an affordable cost.

Research confirms that lower levels of English proficiency and cultural differences can add an additional layer of structural disadvantage, compounding already—and sometimes creating—inadequate access to resources and vulnerability to energy poverty. Using longitudinal data from the [Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia \(HILDA\) survey](#), researchers from RMIT and Monash University⁵ found that ethnic diversity is associated with greater likelihood of experiencing energy poverty and hardship in Australia. Moreover, an analysis of the ABS 2021 Census data (Figure 1) reveals that people with lower levels of proficiency in spoken English also have lower levels of income compared to those with higher proficiency in English.

Figure 1 – Proficiency in Spoken English and total personal income (weekly)



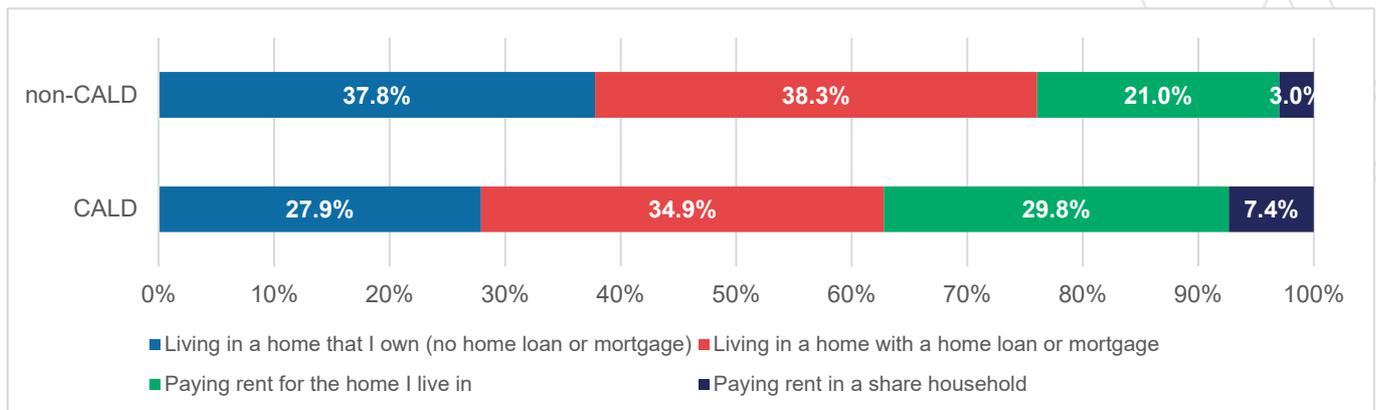
Source: ECA analysis of ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2021, [TableBuilder](#).

The 2021 Census reported that 30.6% of Australians were living in rental accommodation. A survey of 2500 households conducted for ECA by The Insight Centre—with 11% (277 in total) of respondents identifying as from a CALD background—revealed that CALD people are also more likely to be renting and living in share households⁶, as Figure 2 illustrates.

⁵ Churchill, S. A., & Smyth, R. (2020). Ethnic diversity, energy poverty and the mediating role of trust: Evidence from household panel data for Australia. *Energy Economics*, 86(104663). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eneco.2020.104663>

⁶ Similar conclusions were found by the NSW Council of Social Services in their latest [Barely Hanging On Report - The Cost-of-Living Crisis in NSW](#), which includes a spotlight on CALD households. In their research, 21% (or 240) of survey respondents were from CALD backgrounds, and were more likely to be renting (51%) than non-CALD people (46%). Among the CALD people who were homeowners, they were also more likely to be paying a mortgage (71%) than non-CALD people (61%). The report concludes that respondents from a CALD background were significantly more likely to be in housing stress than other respondents.

Figure 2 – CALD background and housing tenure



Source: ECA *Household Energy Consumers Information Research, 2023*.

ECA’s [Household Energy Consumers Information Research](#) also shows that a greater proportion of CALD consumers (28%) live in apartments, compared to non-CALD consumers (12%). As discussed in our [Stepping Up](#) report (p.8), households living in rental properties and multi-unit dwellings face some of the biggest challenges to going all-electric and benefitting from the energy transition.

Our [December 2023 Energy Consumer Sentiment Survey \(ECSS\)](#) indicates there is a growing energy divide in Australia. Renters are less likely to live in homes with energy efficient technology such as solar panels, smart meters, efficient heating and cooling systems, ceiling and wall insulation, and shutters or other external shading devices in their homes. Meanwhile, homeowners are more likely to be considering further decarbonisation strategies, such as buying an electric vehicle and converting to a fully electric home.

What we heard in the Deep Dive workshops

Energy inefficient housing is causing harm

The harm caused by energy inefficient housing was a major concern raised in the workshop discussions. Participants shared their own experiences of coping with extreme indoor temperatures during heatwaves in the past summer and the effect that had on their health and poor wellbeing, as well as how they faced very high energy bills from greater reliance on air conditioning.

People talked about the adverse impacts of poor energy efficiency in older homes.

A healthy house prevents illness

“Better quality, thermally efficient and healthy houses prevent illnesses. House is a determinant of health. We need to identify, acknowledge and address the discrimination inherent to households that suffer with unaffordable energy bills and hot unhealthy homes.” --- Dr. Kim Loo, Malaysian Chinese female, Deep Dive Workshop Participant.

Renters feel powerless

Workshop participants described their homes and those of family, relatives and friends in their communities as unhealthy and potentially dangerous. They talked about their lack of power to address that harm – they couldn’t make changes themselves, and were concerned that asking for improvements would lead to higher rents.

They also discussed about the challenges that newly arrived migrants experience due to their unfamiliarity with Australian consumer rights and energy retailer market options.

We had no rights

"I am new to this country; I have a kid to care for and have work responsibilities. My husband and I have a lot more responsibilities. I had no idea that we have rights as renters in the energy system, we were put in an energy deal by our real estate agent who told us we had no rights, and we have no idea how the energy system works here. We are paying more than we can afford to pay. [...]". ---
- Voices for Power Train the Trainer Program Ukrainian community participant (2023 Program Final Report)

People support government-led regulation

Workshop participants showed strong support for reforms that would make it easier for households to understand the energy efficiency of a home, and wanted landlords and real estate agents to be more responsive and helpful.

The solutions they called for aligned with [previous research findings from ECA](#) and reinforced current advocacy efforts from both our organisations:

- mandatory disclosure at point of advertisement (lease and sale) by real estate agents of a home's energy efficiency rating and its likely average annual energy costs;
- minimum energy efficiency standards for rental properties;
- the Federal Government should develop a roadmap with set targets forbidding the rental of unhealthy and inefficient homes, with applicable penalties for landlords who do not comply;
- disclosure at sale or lease if a home is part of an embedded network, as these may further restrict people's choices and lock them into high energy prices; and
- all new builds and major renovations should be energy efficient and all electric, with all existing homes to have a clear target to reach at least a 7-star rating (in NatHERS) and all electric by 2030.

People are worried about the impacts of climate change now and into the future

SCF has actively engaged in the community sector's call for policy and regulatory reform that will improve the energy performance of Australian homes. Measures like mandatory disclosure and minimum standards for rental properties have been strongly supported by consumer organisations, including ECA, for some time.

What came through very clearly in the workshops though, was a deep concern from the participants that their homes – and the homes of their families and friends – are not coping with weather now. Western Sydney is well known to be one of the key cultural diversity hubs of Australia and is a region experiencing increasingly extreme summer temperatures.

More days of extreme heat are not only impacting people's energy bills, they are also affecting people's quality of life and health today.

Climate change, inefficient homes, and poor quality of life

"In Western Sydney, climate change is not theoretical – it's already affecting quality of lives, increasing cost of living, and having negative impacts on family relationships." — Sheikh Adid Alrubai, Iraqi male, Voices for Power leader and Deep Dive Workshop Participant.

Resilience to extreme weather events is a community concern, and CALD communities want community-led energy resilience initiatives being supported and funded by all three levels of government to ensure CALD consumers' homes are climate-ready and resilient.

Action-oriented and clear communications from industry

CALD energy consumers must be provided with easy-to-understand and relevant information through their bills and interactions with energy service providers to support energy costs monitoring, energy efficiency measures, and smarter management of energy consumption.

Energy industry jargon and the complexities of a transitioning system further increase the risk of harm and disadvantage to consumers, as acknowledged by the Australian Energy Regulator⁷ (AER).

Limited proficiency in English can make it difficult for some CALD consumers—particularly that 3% of Australia’s population who do not speak English well or at all—to understand their energy bills, energy-related information (e.g. energy efficiency measures, consumer energy resources, electrification solutions, etc.), and/or communicate effectively with energy retailers. The lack of in-language and culturally sensitive materials further hinders people’s ability to make well-informed decisions and can result in CALD consumers missing out on energy-saving opportunities.

It is important to note, however, that CALD engagement should not be defined on a deficit model, particularly when many English-speaking consumers face similar hurdles. It’s estimated that 44% of the Australian population have literacy levels considered to be below what is required to fully participate in society and get by in everyday life⁸.

SCF’s Voices for Power Program Report has provided additional personal testimonies about the challenges CALD households face when they need to urgently communicate and negotiate critical support such as a payment plan with their energy provider.

Firstly, it is uncommon for providers to have interpreters readily available, and so CALD consumers are asked to leave a message and wait for an interpreter to call back later. This results in delays with callbacks and issues being addressed—at best. However, more often than not, there is a total lack of response, and their concerns remain unaddressed. CALD consumers end up anxious, distressed, distrustful of institutions and lacking the support they need. SCF notes that participants in the Voices for Power program often see the ‘energy system’ as indifferent to their needs and concerns.

They never called back

“This lady said that she received her first bill, and she paid it but after a few days she received another bill with the same dates and amount. She tried to call them through the interpreting line that energy companies say that they offer the CALD communities, and they said, ‘leave a message and we will call you back’. Obviously, they never called her back. I heard that more people have the same problem too.” ---- Voices for Power Train the Trainer Program participant from Migrant Resource Centre Liverpool (Quarterly Status Report - July to September 2023)

Real-time in-language assistance and multilingual support services are crucial. Limited English language proficiency should not be a barrier to effective consumer engagement with energy retailers, for instance. As the SCF states⁹,

Lack of provision for interpreters is a significant barrier to communication and will impact CALD community trust of the energy system and lead to disengagement between these energy consumers and their energy provider. Legislation that requires energy providers to ensure consumers have access to interpreters within a reasonable timeframe would help and avoid issues and concerns escalating to non-payment and supply getting cut off.

⁷ AER. (2021). *Consumer Vulnerability Strategy – Draft for Consultation*.

⁸ Consumer Policy Research Centre (CPRC). (2020). *Exploring regulatory Approaches to Consumer Vulnerability: A Report for the AER*.

⁹ Sydney Community Forum. (2023). *Challenges and emerging issues & concerns – CALD communities in the energy space*.

What we heard in the Deep Dive workshops

Bills are too complex

There was broad agreement from the workshop participants that energy bills were too complex, and difficult to understand. People wanted simpler bills, that included information and links to support for vulnerable consumers. People also wanted retailers to be more proactive in linking consumers to support.

The participants also called on the AER to partner with more CALD community groups to co-design its next iteration of the [Better Bills Guideline](#).

People hate estimated bills

A number of participants told stories of their frustration and anger when they realised they were paying an estimated, not actual, bill and had been for some time. It undermined their trust in their retailer, and they weren't clear on how to get an accurate reading, or how to dispute what they thought was an unreasonable estimate. People wanted it to be very clear on the bill when it was an estimate, and to be told equally clearly how they could get an actual bill (e.g. sending a photo of their meter to their retailer).

People want to work with decision-makers to improve information to CALD consumers

During the Deep Dive workshops, participants role-played what a good experience with a retailer's customer service could look like. In those interactions, we saw retailers being proactive, empathetic, and taking a more humanising approach that considered people's needs first.

Participants proposed that energy service providers prioritise bilingual recruitment as a diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) measure, and train their staff, particularly call-centre staff, in cultural competency.

Energy service providers must improve interpreter services and in-language information provision

Difficulties in securing an interpreter, or information in language, was a repeated concern of workshop participants. People suggested that energy service providers should be obliged to provide interpreter services within 24 hours of initial contact and at a time that suits the CALD consumer.

Workshop participants also noted that technology-based innovative solutions can go a long way to addressing the language barrier—but they should not be proposed as the sole solution. During workshops, the potential for artificial intelligence (AI) in facilitating real-time and asynchronous interactions in different languages was discussed.

AI solutions can be used to reduce costs and improve the quality and speed of translations in communications for customer services, mobile apps, infographics, videos, etc. People did note that those digital solutions will not suit every consumer – people with low digital literacy, or limited access to the internet will still require a phone number.

AI-enabled better customer experience

“Advancements in AI-powered language translation offer a powerful solution for customer care interactions. By leveraging real-time speech and text translation, we can eliminate the need for wait times associated with traditional interpreter services. This allows for immediate communication with customers in their preferred language, enhancing the overall customer experience.” --- Jijo George, Indian male, IT Professional, Voices for Power leader and Deep Dive Workshop Participant.

CALD people need the right information to help manage their energy bills

CALD consumers want to see information on how to save energy presented in their preferred language and media. That aligns with the findings of ECA's [Household Energy Consumers Information Research](#), which revealed that many consumers are interested in getting a breakdown of how the major appliances in their homes and their energy behaviours contribute to their bills. They wanted to understand how to save money by managing electricity consumption during peak/off-peak hours.

Workshop participants noted that the energy industry and governments often produce translated content under the incorrect assumption that every member of a particular language community is proficient in that language.

Written literacy can be a challenge even in their own language, so short videos and vignettes in simple language could be a better option for raising awareness about the energy market, their rights and other advice and energy saving tips.

One suggestion that was strongly supported by workshop participants was to use existing media channels like SBS and community radio, and migrant community newspapers and social media to provide information in language for CALD groups. They saw opportunities for government and industry to partner with community-based media to alert CALD communities to the opportunities and risks of the energy transition.

In-language and concise information

“Community language is very important. From my Chinese community, I heard some people got scammed by fake solar companies. So, we migrants, as we moved in from another country and we speak English as a second language, (the jargon) of renewable energy and the energy bills are quite intimidating, especially to a little bit older generation like my mum’s and my dad’s age. Our communities need information in community languages to help us really narrow down truth from reliable sources.” --- Lina Chen Pan, Chinese female, Deep Dive participant.

In summary, CALD workshop participants called for more ownership from the government and industry in supporting and funding such community energy literacy initiatives by either allocating more resources, increasing cultural and linguistic diversity in recruitment, and by industry sharing its profits to support bottom-up community-led initiatives.

Give support by going to the community

“A lot of our people are elderly, and they are not very familiar with technologies. To teach them how to use digital tools is important. Our elderly community maybe find it hard to seek help from different government support locations. They do not drive, and they are not familiar with public transport. We must give support by going to the community instead of communities travelling far to seek help.” --- Miguel Ferrero, Chilean male, Deep Dive Participant & Aged Care Sector Worker.

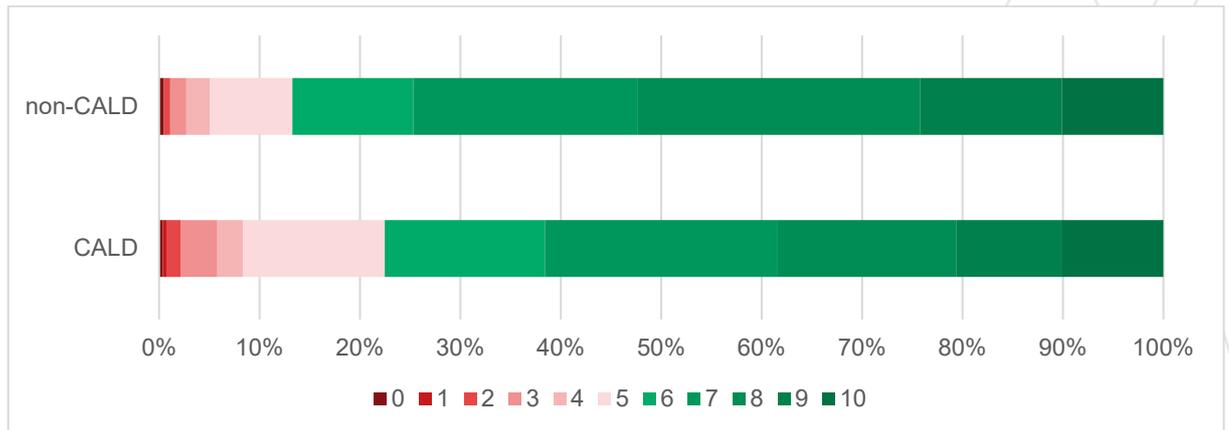
Empathetic and accessible support through peers

CALD consumers should be able to access the services, information and support they need in a language they prefer through the sources they trust.

We are seeing consumers’ confidence in the energy market declining as cost-of-living pressures, high energy bills and misinformation about the energy transition hit people’s lives and livelihoods. ECA’s [December 2023 Energy Consumer Sentiment Survey](#) reveals that consumer confidence in the energy market declined by 4% over the past year for households and 6% among small business owners, reaching the lowest level in five years.

ECA’s [Household Energy Consumers Information Research](#) indicates there’s a mismatch between who consumers trust to get information and advice on energy-related matters and the sources providing the information currently. It also found that CALD households are less confident that they know about the actions they can take to manage their energy usage (Figure 3).

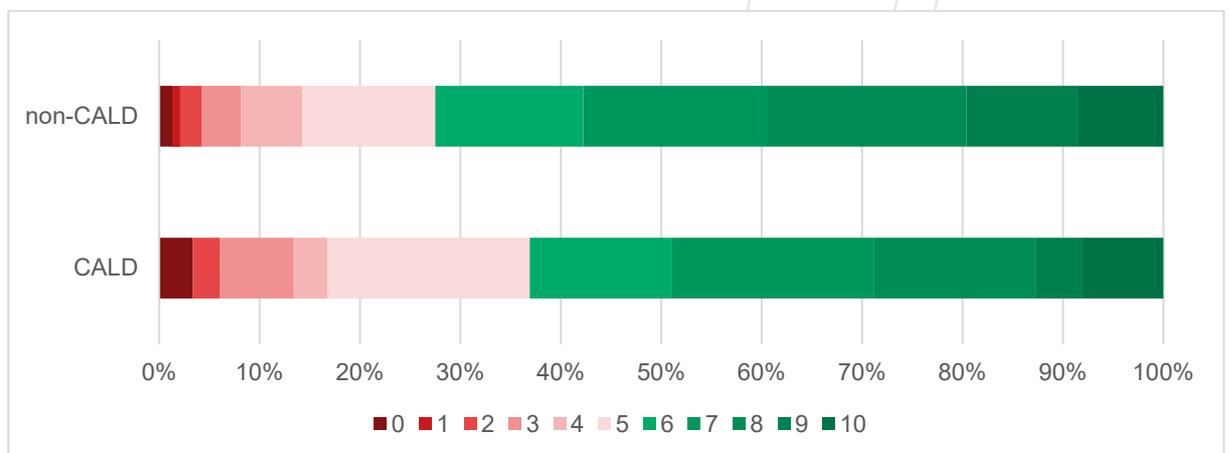
Figure 3 - Thinking about your energy use, how confident are you that you know the things you can do to minimise your energy consumption? A rating of 0 represents “not at all confident: while a rating of 10 indicates you are “extremely confident”.



Source: ECA analysis of [Household Energy Consumers Communications Research, 2023](#) by The Insights Centre

ECA’s research also shows CALD consumers find it harder to locate and understand accurate information compared to non-CALD consumers (Figures 4 and 5). And CALD consumers are more likely than non-CALD consumers to agree that it takes too much effort to make changes and make their homes more energy efficient to reduce energy costs¹⁰. The barriers they face, and the lack of appropriate support, is leading to mistrust and scepticism.

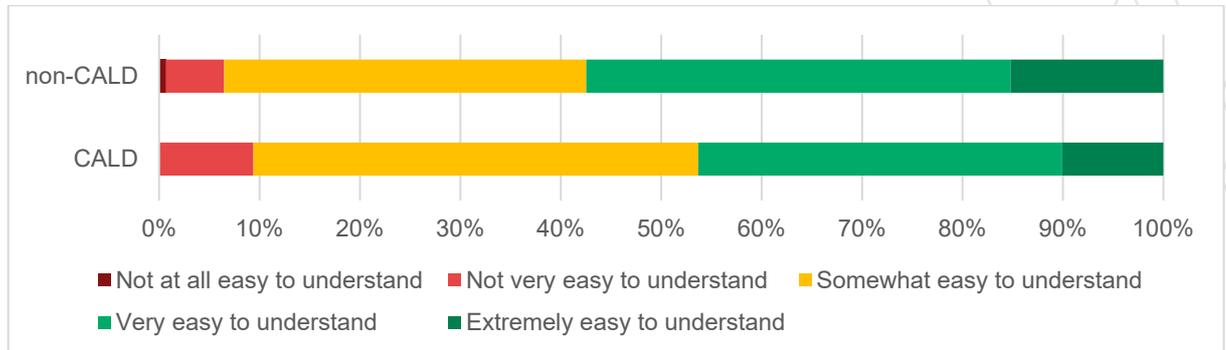
Figure 4 - On a scale of 0-10, how easy was it to find the right information for you and your circumstances? A rating of 0 indicates it was “not at all easy”, a rating of 10 “extremely easy”.



Source: ECA analysis of [Household Energy Consumers Communications Research, 2023](#)

¹⁰ According to the same survey, CALD consumers were less likely to have solar panels or batteries installed.

Figure 5 - Thinking about the information you found, how easy was it for you to understand?



Source: ECA analysis of *Household Energy Consumers Communications Research, 2023*

The language difference can make navigating an unfamiliar energy system even more complex, placing CALD communities at higher risk of feeling left out, marginalised, and with no support. Policy and industry jargon exacerbates disengagement, alienating not only CALD people but also widening the gap for a broader spectrum of consumers.

Policy jargon and community (dis)engagement

“I think the language about “minimum [rental] energy efficiency standards” should be changed to avoid confusion. As a renter and a member of the CALD community, I find it hard to understand why it is ‘minimum’. I think it should be ‘maximum’ for people to understand. When policy language considers our communities’ understanding, it makes us more involved. In that way, when people understand the policy language, therefore, they can support and advocate.” ---- Len Cruz, Filipino female, Deep Dive Workshop Participant.

Moreover, the lack of sufficient and diverse representation of CALD consumers in major energy decision-making processes further reduces the chances of inclusive outcomes.

Australia’s many migrant community associations and local networks are an overlooked but powerful trust channel that could be utilised to promote engagement and build relationships with CALD consumers.

Strengthening CALD engagement and education through grassroots organisations can provide safe and trusted spaces for community members to share their concerns, build their confidence to take part in the journey to net zero, and provide partners for industry and government to co-design solutions.

Given the success and material impact of localised, grassroots and tailored initiatives, CALD community advocates such as the SCF continue to urge governments to invest in sustained community education and place-based engagement to support CALD consumers active participation in the transition and diverse representation in energy decision making processes.

What we heard from the workshops

Reaching people through trusted voices

Trust is key, and relying on the strong social networks that CALD households develop within their communities is an avenue for effective engagement.

Community-based support programs that tap into the rich social capital existing within these multicultural networks could help tackle misinformation, scepticism, and mistrust. These networks are excellent channels of knowledge sharing, learning and technology adaptation. Tapping into these diaspora networks is the key in effectively engaging with CALD communities.

The power of social networks for CALD consumers

"Energy literacy education is really important in CALD community. Our community has language barriers to truly understanding the energy system in Australia. Therefore, it is crucial for our communities to have the education opportunity to understand what the barriers are for CALD consumers to access renewable energy. This should not be a one-off process. It should be a continuing process to keep ourselves updated and teach our people what our rights and responsibilities are. We should teach our community how to really solve the problem!" --- David Deng, Chinese male, Deep Dive Workshop Participant, Retired Electrical Engineer.

However, this work can happen only through sustained place-based relational engagement with these communities. Communities perceive the usual one-off consultations as transactional which can undermine confidence and lead to further mistrust.

The Deep Dive participants recommended that government and energy industry partner with existing trusted migrant organisations who can work with their communities to raise awareness, offer energy-related training, and promote energy efficiency programs with CALD communities. The Voices for Power (VfP) Energy Literacy Program is a successful example of that kind of collaboration and partnership for empowered CALD consumers (see Box 2).

Discussions in the workshop also highlighted that there can be a significant resource burden on these CALD organisations and networks. They pointed out that it is unfair to expect volunteers to continue to carry what can be a significant work in addition to their own jobs and lives. It's important that government and industry work with those community leaders and organisations to understand how to resource that work.

Box 2 – Learning from Voices for Power

SCF and Sydney Alliance partnered with migrant community leaders to co-design a Train the Trainer Energy Literacy Program that is culturally safe, responsive to the needs and priorities of migrant communities and action oriented. This energy literacy program is delivered in plain English and community languages, by bi-lingual staff employed by SCF and funded through a partnership with a small group of energy companies. Since the VfP Energy Literacy program began in 2020, it has trained almost two thousand people from across the diversity of Western and South-Western Sydney's migrant communities' and its reach is in excess of 10,000 people from across the broad cross-section of Sydney's migrant community.

Key learnings from three years of delivering the VfP Energy Literacy program is the knowledge that we need to place people in the centre of this program, and we need to be responsive to the whole person when we engage with them, not just their energy related needs and concerns. Migrant communities have complex intersecting pressures and needs, and we can only establish trust and build leadership if we respond to the priority issues and concerns that surface through the process of storytelling and sharing of lived experience during the process of relational organising and training.

The VfP Program has helped CALD people to considerably improve their knowledge about how to read and understand their energy bills and the different cost components, analyse appliances' energy consumption, assess their eligibility to concessions and rebates, and identify the different actors in the energy system. Building people's capacity increases their confidence and agency, and VfP participants have stated that after attending the training program, their confidence about tracking their energy bills, seeking/getting payment support, and adopting energy saving practices improved drastically. Further, there's a multiplier effect, as program participants report they take the time to share their learnings with their families and other people in their community networks.

The VfP program builds migrant communities' capacity and knowledge of the energy system, and through deep engagement and capacity building, it reciprocates by surfacing stories, strengths,

passion for advocacy and action, and the depth of knowledge, expertise and skills among participants. This in turn builds our capacity and understanding of the needs, strength and talents of CALD communities. This knowledge is critical to our advocacy work on CALD communities' needs, priorities and strengths for decision makers and stakeholders in the energy system, and it ensures the promise of 'an energy transition for all in which no one is left behind' can be delivered.

Delivering tailored and practical advice: the Community Energy Hub

We asked people in the workshop to vote for the solutions they thought would offer CALD consumers the most effective assistance.

The most popular by far was the creation of Community Energy Hubs for CALD consumers. These mobile hubs will go directly to communities, to provide energy information and advice. The hubs can work directly through trusted groups and spaces, in community languages and culturally appropriate ways.

SCF, in the last three years through its Voices for Power Program, has developed a practical and rapidly implementable model of a Community Energy Hub and demonstrated the feasibility of this bottom-up model.

The workshop participants agreed that this must be a community-led model run by the communities for the communities. Funding would be required from government and industry to establish and operate them.

They saw the Hub as building the capacity of CALD consumers. It could help match new migrants with mentors or migrant community groups of similar cultural and language backgrounds to assist with familiarisation with the energy system. Building on the Voices for Power community organising and knowledge sharing model, it could offer opportunities for newly arrived migrants to access information and CALD community to discuss and discern their energy challenges, as well as learn from each other's experiences. And it could be a source of feedback and advice to government and industry.

The multiplier effect

"I work with new migrants, and I understand their struggles of trying to settle in a new country. Understanding the energy system and learning the skills of saving on energy bills are crucial to all migrants. I am privileged to share Voices for Power energy training with my community to support them gain the energy knowledge and build our confidence to get the best energy deal [...]" ---
Voices for Power Train the Trainer Program participant and trainer from Chinese community (2022 Program Final Report).

Government support to help decarbonisation

CALD consumers want to see the three levels of government partner with CALD communities to deliver accessible and tailored programs to support decarbonisation efforts, lower bills and contribute to more resilient communities.

Like all Australians, CALD consumers are being asked to take action to help with the transition to a net zero energy system to address the potential harm of climate change. People are being asked to upgrade the energy efficiency of their homes and appliances, purchase an electric vehicle, invest in solar panels and batteries and change their behaviour. That is happening at a time when the high cost of living and rising energy prices are forcing more people into financial stress.

The [AER's Annual Retail Markets Report 2022-2023](#) noted "electricity affordability worsened across most jurisdictions in 2022–23 for both low-income and average-income households". The proportion of residential customers with energy debt is currently at its highest level in the past five years. The

overall proportion of electricity customers on hardship programs is also at its highest level in the past 5 years, above pre-COVID-19 levels, and the number of electricity and gas customers exiting hardship programs continued to decline in 2022–23.

The [2023 State of the Energy Market](#) report found that customers on payment plans and hardship programs use significantly more electricity than the ‘average’ customer, typically because they’re unable to afford energy efficient appliances, or install solar panels or batteries (community energy resources) that would help reduce their energy bill, or improve the energy efficiency of their homes.

Climateworks [Climate-Ready Homes](#) report modelled different levels of retrofitting Australian homes, and found that while there will be energy savings for most households, the societal benefits are significant from lower energy system costs and improved health outcomes. It recommended that governments must provide assistance to people to undertake these upgrades, given a more efficient housing stock has longer term benefits for Australia.

Similarly, ECA’s [Stepping Up](#) report underlined that no one must be left behind in Australia’s energy future; the last households to electrify should be the ones that choose to wait, not those who couldn’t afford to.

What we heard in the workshops

The Deep Dive workshop discussions highlighted the crucial role all three levels of government can play in supporting CALD consumers and communities to lower their energy bills, decarbonise and take part in the transition to renewables.

Helping those in energy hardship

Workshop participants viewed existing measures of assistance as not sufficient and called for two key actions:

- that Federal and State/Territory governments review existing hardship measures to make them more effective, enduring and sustainable. This means shifting away from one-off and siloed assistance with payment difficulties to more integrated solutions that identify vulnerability early and prevent hardship in the first instance.
 - Reflecting the location of the participants, the Workshop noted particular issues with NSW Government’s Energy Accounts Payment Assistance (EAPA) vouchers. They asked that the amount and maximum number of applications in a year be increased, the eligibility criteria be expanded (to include embedded network customers and small businesses operating from home, for example), and the list of providers be expanded to include more multi-faith, multi-cultural and migrant community organisations; and
- that Federal government provide grants and rebates to improve energy efficiency, install renewable energy solutions and decarbonise the homes of low-income/cash-poor households.

More government support for CALD communities

“I am surprised that I did not see any government incentives for installing solar panels for CALD communities. There should be more support for people with reasonable criteria.” --- Miguel Ferrero, Chilean male, Deep Dive Participant & Aged Care Sector Worker.

Ensuring energy is affordable

Electrifying and improving the energy efficiency of a home can be a costly and disruptive endeavour, out of reach for many CALD consumers.

Workshop participants agreed that government funding will be needed to support efficient electrification of Australia’s most vulnerable households. Enabling decarbonisation programs with

grants for energy efficiency, on-site renewables and electrification can reduce the barriers to uptake for those in socioeconomic disadvantage.

Among the suggestions, workshop participants prioritised the following recommendations:

- Local councils provide financial incentives and/or council rate discounts for community bulk solar rooftop purchases. Clean and affordable energy should be available for all, not just those with the means to afford it.
- Consumers with unexpected high bills are offered free energy audits and financial advice funded by the State Government.

Final remarks

Culturally sensitive, people-centred, tailored and localised solutions are required to ensure CALD communities are not left behind in Australia's transition to a better, cleaner and more affordable energy future. Throughout this Deep Dive, it became evident that community-led initiatives and sustained place-based engagement with CALD communities can lever existing relationships of trust and can support people to access the information and assistance they need in the language they prefer and in ways that suit them.

This report highlights that meaningful and empathetic engagement with CALD communities must go beyond understanding the problems—it must lead to co-designed solutions. CALD people are eager to discuss with governments, industry, market bodies and other decision makers what a just, inclusive and equitable energy transition means and how to get there leaving no one behind. In other words, CALD people want their voices heard.

ECA and SCF will advocate for the recommendations outlined in this report and encourage all CALD community organisations across Australia to do the same. These recommendations will lead to the desired future described by the participants in this Deep Dive research: one in which CALD consumers are confident in their decisions about energy, receive effective and tailored support when they need it, and can ensure that their homes and small businesses are climate ready and resilient.

Finally, we would like to thank all Voices for Power community leaders for their time and dedication to this Deep Dive. We appreciate them for generously sharing their stories and representing their communities with such passion. We would also like to thank the core Deep Dive Project Team for leading and managing this adventure from inception to completion – particularly Kerry Connors, Asha Ramzan, Carol Valente, Nirmal Joy and Jijo George. We are also deeply appreciative of Thriving Communities Partnership, who helped Energy Consumers Australia develop the methodology for the Deep Dive groundbreaking engagement and research methodology.

Appendix 1

Supporting CALD Australians to be empowered energy consumers – Toolkit of Recommendations

Professor Ross Gordon, Dr Foluke Badejo and Dr Theresa Harada from Queensland University of Technology (QUT) Business School developed a toolkit of recommendations for Australian energy market actors based on extensive and deep engagement with CALD energy consumers.

Their research, funded by ECA, found that existing energy market narratives fail to represent and engage CALD energy consumers, thus leading to CALD energy consumers feeling unrepresented in energy policy. They also conducted qualitative interviews and video ethnographies with CALD energy consumers about their everyday lived experiences and narratives of energy consumption, and co-designed solutions to address the market and policy failures.

The priority recommendations outlined below have proven extremely helpful in building our knowledge base and providing a framework of topics for exploration and in-depth discussions in the Deep Dive workshops. As noted below, there's strong alignment between the toolkit's findings and what we heard from CALD community leaders during the workshops, which reflects the complementarity of both projects.

We strongly recommend governments and energy industry consult this toolkit to help develop better engagement practices with CALD people and design inclusive energy policies, programs, product and services.

Priority recommendation	Aim and rationale	Alignment with the Deep Dive insights
Develop representative energy narratives for CALD consumers	<p>Appropriate framing in energy market literature is essential to ensure engagement with CALD communities and that can assist with the transition to sustainable energy futures.</p> <p>Use effective storytelling to communicate with CALD energy consumers.</p>	<p>CALD people perceive the 'energy system' as indifferent to their needs and concerns. They want to see a narrative about the energy transition that reflects their priorities, needs, concerns and values.</p>
Foster community engagement & partnerships with CALD populations	<p>CALD communities have a mistrust of energy providers that can be remedied by developing outreach programs that engage with groups and agencies in the community.</p> <p>Service providers need to engage with CALD communities on a personal level. This may involve direct engagement with community leaders (churches, mosques, schools etc.) to develop pathways to more effective communication channels.</p>	<p>CALD people are keen to work with government and industry to improve information provision and engagement with CALD consumers.</p> <p>The Deep Dive participants recommended that government and energy industry partner with existing trusted migrant organisations who can work with their communities to raise awareness, offer energy-related training, and promote energy efficiency programs with CALD communities.</p> <p>Community leaders also believe that the Community Energy Hub can be a source of feedback and advice to government and industry.</p>

<p>Improve support for accurate and understandable energy billing, consumption monitoring and tracking</p>	<p>CALD consumers need to better understand their energy consumption patterns and how their energy costs are calculated.</p> <p>Billing information needs to be presented in a form that promotes greater understanding of how energy is used, how to achieve energy efficiency and reduce energy costs.</p>	<p>Deep Dive workshop participants wanted simpler actual (not estimated) bills, that included information and links to support for vulnerable consumers.</p> <p>Participants also urged energy service providers to improve interpreter services and in-language information provision.</p> <p>They want to be provided with easy-to-understand and relevant information through their bills and interactions with energy service providers to support energy costs monitoring, energy efficiency measures, and smarter management of energy consumption.</p>
<p>Familiarise CALD customers with energy policies and programs through relevant support services and existing trusted networks</p>	<p>To assist CALD energy consumers to understand the direction of government energy policies.</p> <p>Energy policy should be developed in consultation with CALD communities to ensure inclusion.</p> <p>Greater knowledge of energy programs and policies need to be targeted to CALD consumers.</p>	<p>CALD people are worried about the impacts of climate change, and support government-led regulation towards decarbonising homes. However, most feel powerless and, without the proper support, cannot act upon improving the energy efficiency of their homes or moving away from gas.</p> <p>CALD people are eager to discuss with governments, industry, market bodies and other decision makers what a just, inclusive and equitable energy transition means and partner with governments to ensure that decarbonisation measures are appropriately targeted to the needs of CALD households and small businesses.</p>
<p>Improve the cultural competency of organisations working in the Australian energy market</p>	<p>It is important for energy market stakeholders to develop their cultural competency to support CALD consumers. This would involve training staff and adopting a whole-of-organisation approach, regarding the nature, complexities and characteristics of energy harm and CALD customers who may be experiencing it. It also reflects the adoption of an ethics of care perspective.</p>	<p>Deep Dive workshop participants want energy retailers and service providers to commit to prioritising bilingual recruitment as a diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) measure, and training their staff, particularly call-centre staff, in cultural competency.</p> <p>Participants also suggested that retailers and service providers share part of its profits to support bottom-up community-led initiatives.</p>
<p>Support CALD consumers to be energy efficient while maintaining comfort, health and well-being through strategic social marketing behaviour change programs</p>	<p>To achieve behavioural change through targeted social marketing programs with CALD energy customers that feature strategies, tools, and options for energy efficiency. It needs to be culturally appropriate.</p>	<p>CALD consumers want to see information on how to save energy presented in their preferred language and media. They suggested government and industry to partner with SBS and community radio, and migrant community newspapers and social media to provide information in language for CALD groups about the opportunities and risks of the energy transition.</p>

Appendix 2

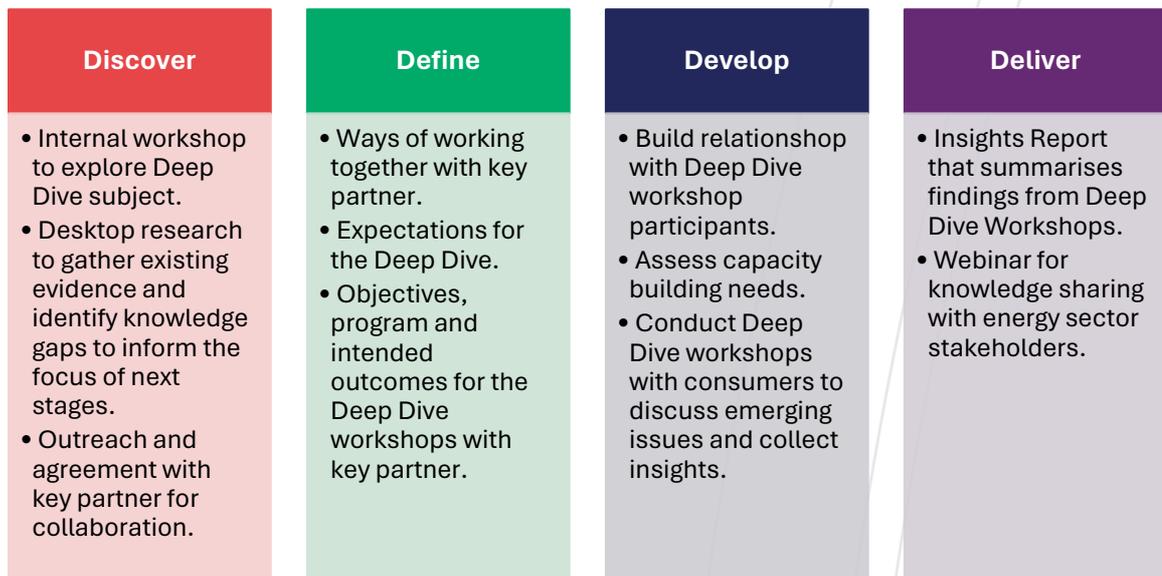
Part 1 – The Deep Dive Project methodology

The Deep Dive is a project intended to improve the sector's understanding of the diversity of consumers and consumer needs, with focus on insights that can address energy vulnerability and exclusion.

Energy Consumers Australia engaged Thriving Communities Partnership to develop a draft methodology for running regular Deep Dives. The project's anticipated outcomes are twofold:

1. Increase the understanding of vulnerability within the energy sector by:
 - Sharing the insights about the values, needs and preferences of these consumers.
 - Identifying challenges and opportunities to improve outcomes for these consumers.
 - Amplifying unheard consumer voices within the energy sector.
2. Build capacity for advocacy and influence of ECA and its Deep Dive partners by:
 - Creating effective collaborations between consumer organisations and lived experience advocates.
 - Strengthening trust and relationships with other consumer organisations.

The Deep Dive consists of four stages: **Discover**, **Define**, **Develop** and **Deliver**, as shown in the diagram below.

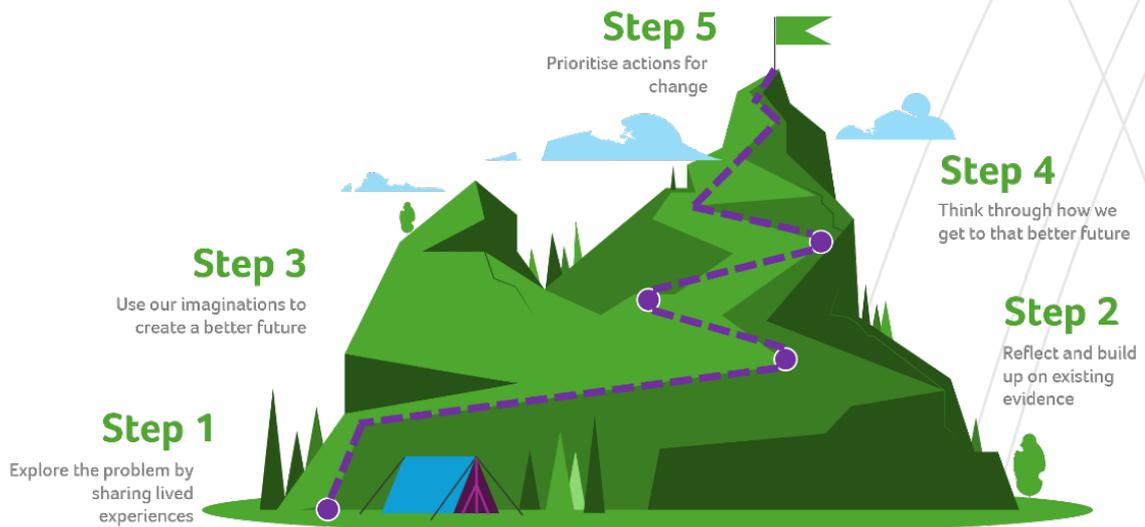


The Deep Dive with CALD energy consumers was the first edition—and successful pilot—of this innovative project. Every Deep Dive that Energy Consumers Australia does will be slightly different, as it will be tailored to the capability and knowledge of the key partners. If you'd like to partner with us on a Deep Dive, please reach out.

Part 2 – A summary of the Deep Dive – CALD consumers edition

To accommodate CALD community members' availability, we held three separate evening sessions. Each session built on discussions and ideas from the previous one, and followed a five-step framework, as depicted next:

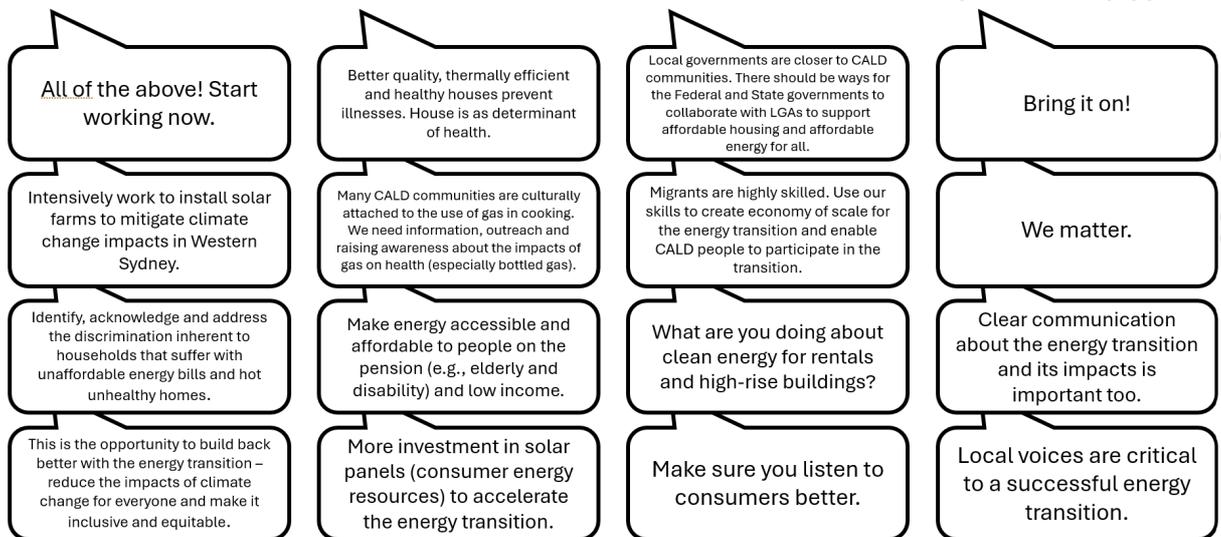
Deep Dive Workshops Journey



In the first 2-hour session (held online), we focused on Steps 1 and 2.

Workshop participants were prompted to share what they wanted the Energy Minister Chris Bowen to know about themselves and their energy needs. This is what we've heard:

Access to renewables.	Cleaner, resilient and healthier environment for future generations.	Training about the different solar rooftop options.	The ideas and opinions of CALD communities are important to the energy transition.
Unaffordable energy bills are breaking me.	We're ready for tough conversations and want to be part of decisions about the energy transition.	Learn more about what we can expect from the government and the energy transition. Solar for renters.	Create incentives for landlords to improve the quality of rental properties (i.e., energy efficiency and smart tech).
Everyone must be able to access renewables.	More accessible education about energy to newly arrived families in Australia.	In Western Sydney, climate change is not theoretical – it's already affecting quality of lives, increasing cost of living, and having a negative impacts on family relationships.	Clean energy must be affordable and accessible to everyone.
Address cultural energy needs.	Ability to access renewables and cleaner planet for future generations.	We need more assistance – from EAPA vouchers to access to renewables.	We need to help refugees and asylum seekers to access affordable energy (and better health).



Following that, five ‘fictional’ stories were devised by ECA and SCF to engage workshop participants in exploring the barriers and challenges faced by those characters, sharing with each other in small groups what resonated, intrigued or surprised them across each story, and identifying key themes for in-depth discussion—that have been highlighted throughout the main report. Those stories, as seen below, were all inspired by the real testimonies and lived experience of CALD people that have been carefully gathered and collated by SCF in its close work with CALD communities.

Story 1

Maria had a problem. She paid her energy bill, but then got another bill that was exactly the same. She doesn’t know if the payment she made wasn’t successful or if the energy company made a mistake. She tried to call the energy company using a special phone line they said was for people who speak different languages, but no one ever called her back. She heard that other people had the same problem. Maria is anxious about this issue, because she doesn’t want to have her credit rate impacted.

Story 2

Amir is new to Australia, having arrived a few months ago. He has a child to take care of, a demanding and tiring job, and lots of things to handle with his spouse as they settle here. They didn’t know they had rights when paying for electricity in their rented home. Their real estate agent told them they didn’t have any rights and signed them up for an expensive energy plan. Now, they struggle to pay the bills because it costs a lot more than they can afford.

Story 3

Iris is a single parent and is having a tough time with her energy company and real estate manager. Her last energy bill was huge, but it was an estimated bill, not the actual consumption. Prior to her, a family of 5 lived in her unit. She’s having challenges with finding the electricity meter in her rented unit.

When she calls the real estate company, they don’t know where it is and tell her to call the energy company. But when she calls them, they just send her back to the real estate company. It feels like going around in circles, and Iris is frustrated. Eventually, she gives up because it seems like nobody knows what to do or cares to help.

Story 4

Li is a young international student living with three other international students in Western Sydney. They all share a house together and came to Australia to improve their English skills. Li is the account holder for the electricity and gas bills, and the four of them contribute equally to paying the bills, no matter how much it is or how different their energy usage may be. Their bills keep going up, and the money (stipend) they get from the University stays the same. It's hard for them to pay the bills because they don't have enough money. They are all worried and don't know what to do to solve this problem.

Story 5

Priya, who came to Australia 25 years ago, lives with her children and grandchildren in a home they own but are still paying mortgage. They don't have a lot of money, but they manage to get by. They want to switch to renewable electricity and install solar rooftop to save on bills and help the environment, but they can't find enough information in their language to do it. It's frustrating for them because they really want to make this change, but they don't know how to start, what sort of assistance they can get from the government, or who they can trust to install the system.

On the following session, a 3-hour event held in person in Parramatta, workshop participants were instructed to focus on rewriting those stories with a positive consumer outcome and a better future perspective (Step 3). They were asked: "What would this story look like if the system had supported this person well?". Participants role-played those positive interactions and made it evident how those very different and ideal experiences would make them feel empowered. The photos below portray the energy—*no pun intended*—of the room and some of the preliminary insights.



Reverend Alimoni Taumoepeau, Asha Ramzan and Sheikh Adid Alruba'i.



Ian Epondulan and Ibtisam Hammoud role playing a positive interaction with an energy retailer customer service.



Kim Loo, Tu Le, Lina Chen Pan, David Deng & Ismail Smile role playing interactions with local councils and energy service providers.

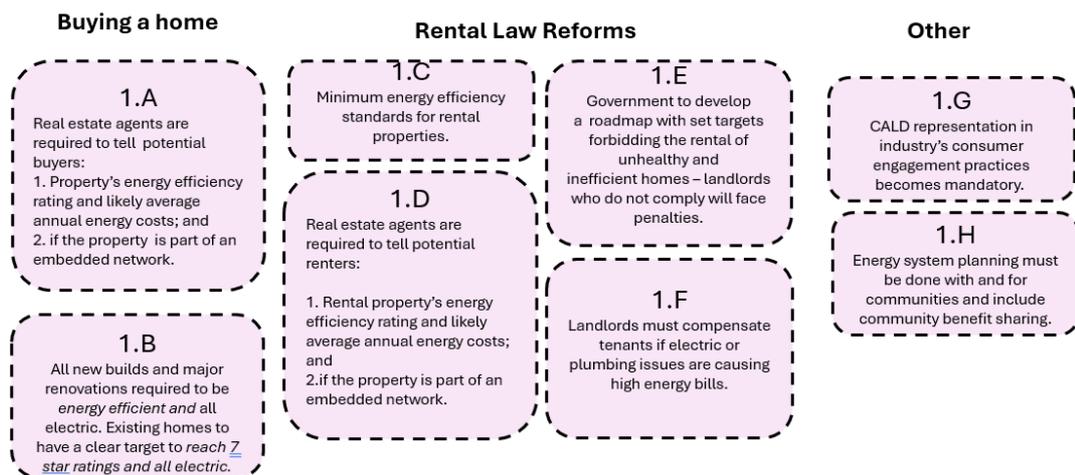


Sundar Raj Sreenivasan, Janice Rodrigues, Nirjala Pandey, Litia, Le Moni and Vaha discussing solutions for a different outcome to Li's experience (Story 4).

The key themes and ideas behind those future-state stories (Step 4) were captured in wall of opportunities and then grouped together according to the four outcomes that, later in the process, have helped structure this Insights Report:

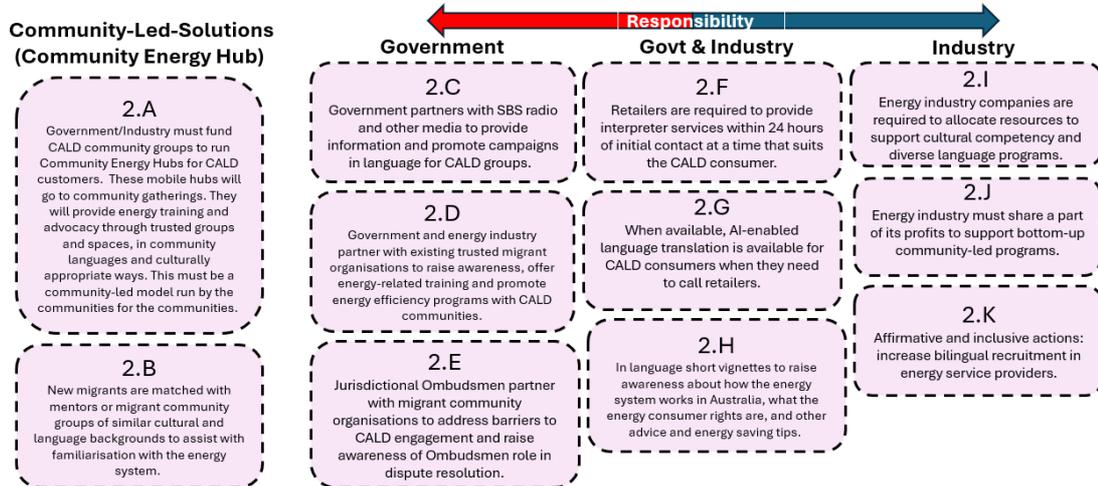
Wall of opportunities

Outcome 1: CALD energy consumers have the agency and feel supported to take action in Australia's net zero journey, and the transition narrative must reflect their needs, concerns and values.



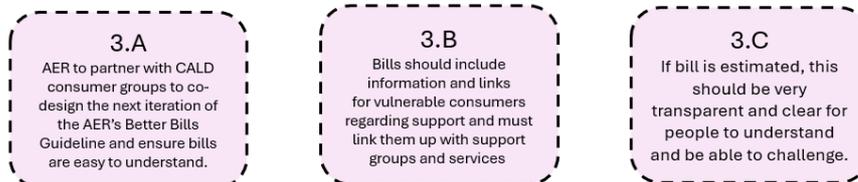
Wall of opportunities

Outcome 2: CALD energy consumers are able to access the information and support they need in a language they prefer.



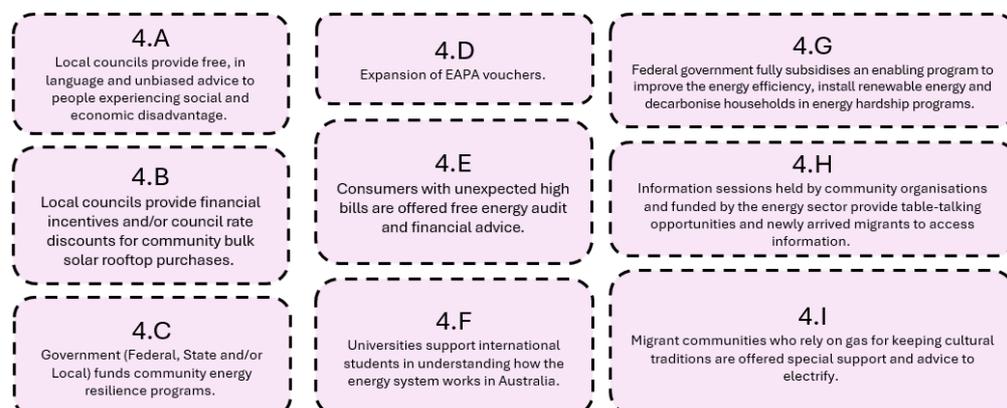
Wall of opportunities

Outcome 3: CALD energy consumers are provided with easy-to-understand and relevant information on their energy use patterns through their bills to support energy costs monitoring, energy efficiency measures, and smarter management of energy consumption.



Wall of opportunities

Outcome 4: CALD energy consumers are aware and able to access tailored programs to support decarbonisation efforts and contribute to more affordable energy bills and resilient communities.



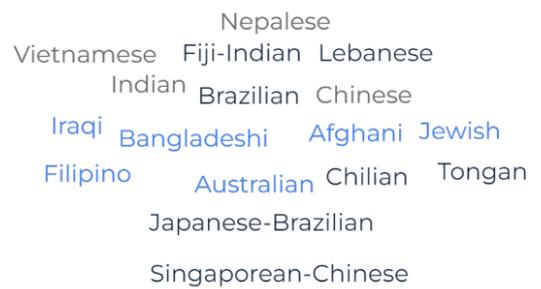
Finally, on our third encounter, another 2-hour session (held online), we focused on Step 5 to prioritise actions for change. Workshop participants were asked to review each of the ideas in the four Walls of Opportunities and cast 6 votes on the ideas they thought should be prioritised. They could choose to cast their 6 votes on one idea only, divide them equally across any 6 ideas, or find any other way to distribute them. The result of this voting exercise is reflected on the key recommendations proposed on page put forward on page 5.

With respect to demographic information on the workshop participants, please see below the impressive diversity of languages and ethnonationalities. We also strived to have gender balanced and diverse age groups represented throughout the three sessions.

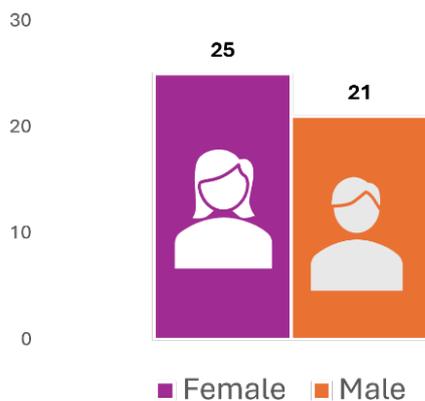
Languages



Ethnonationality



Gender segmentation



Age Group

