



29 September 2023  
Senate Standing Committees on Economics  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Sydney Community Forum (SCF) and the Voices for Power leaders appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback to the senate inquiry on residential electrification.

Sydney Community Forum is a regional community development organisation that has worked towards social justice, inclusion, and sustainability outcomes for disadvantaged and marginalised communities in Sydney since 1974. Through the Voices for Power project, in the past seven years, along with migrant community leaders and in collaboration with Sydney Alliance and its partner organisations, we have worked very closely with hundreds of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) community members, privileging their voices in climate action. In the last three years, through our targeted and co-designed energy literacy program, we have listened to the most marginalised members of the migrant communities in Sydney, most of whom are renters and low-income households. **We are writing this submission, co-written by the following Voices for Power (VfP) leaders, to express our concern about the marginalised migrant communities being left out in Australia's transition to net zero, especially residential electrification.**

1. Sheikh Adid Alrubai, Representative of the Grand Mufti of Australia; Muhajirin Association for Community Development; VfP founding Muslim leader.
2. Rev. Alimoni Taumoepeau, Acting Director Mission Enablement Team Uniting Mission; VfP founding Pacific Community leader.
3. Asha Ramzan, Executive Officer, Sydney Community Forum; VfP founding Fiji Indian leader.
4. Chantelle Ogilvie-Ellis, Co-Lead Organiser, Sydney Alliance.
5. Michal Levy, Jewish Sustainability Initiative; VfP Jewish leader.
6. David Deng, VfP Chinese leader.
7. Ian Epondulan, Our Lady Of Lourdes Catholic Church, Seven Hills; VfP Filipino leader.
8. Ibtisam Hammoud, VfP Lebanese leader.
9. Dibya Sree, VfP Nepalese leader.
10. Prince Vijayan, VfP Indian leader.

We appreciate that the federal government is proactively leading the country's transition into renewables. At Voices for Power, we have campaigned for our communities to have access to clean and affordable energy in the last seven years. Now that policies are being laid out to guide the country's transition into renewables and complete domestic electrification, we want to ensure that the structural and cultural hurdles for migrant communities to engage in this transition are appropriately addressed. It is essential to ensure that CALD communities can make this transition successfully.

In this context, we ask for:

1. Investment in Place-Based Ongoing Engagement: We urge the government to invest in sustained, place-based engagement with CALD communities to support their active participation in residential electrification. By understanding the specific needs and barriers these communities face, we can tailor solutions that foster their inclusion.
2. Ongoing Listening to CALD Communities: Continuous listening and consultation with CALD communities are essential to identify financial, cultural, and knowledge barriers to their

participation. This will ensure that policies are well-informed and responsive to their unique circumstances.

3. **Equitable Policies and Support:** We recommend that the issues raised by CALD communities explicitly inform policies addressing residential electrification. Adequate support mechanisms should be implemented to address these barriers, guaranteeing that CALD and other marginalised communities can access the benefits of residential electrification.

### **What we are hearing through Voices for Power engagement**

Voices for Power listening sessions with over 1,000 CALD community members over the past three years have made it abundantly clear that their journey through this transition will be challenging. Even though there is a high appetite and aspiration to participate in the electrification, significant knowledge gaps and resource limitations hinder their full engagement.

#### Barriers to Community Participation in Energy Transition

Most CALD communities in Sydney are renters, making them particularly vulnerable to exclusion from the transition.

*“Most of the participants were in rental accommodation and so were unable to make major changes to energy use by water heating systems, heating/cooling or by installing solar PV or hot water.”*

*(Energy Charter report - Continuing Cultural Connections: CALD Best Practice in a consumer centric energy market)<sup>1</sup>*

Without targeted support, they risk missing out on the consumer benefits associated with electrification, such as the proposed Consumer Energy Resources Benefits Through Flexible Trading by the Australian Energy Market Commission (AEMC) [Reference: AEMC Proposal, 2023<sup>2</sup>]. Policymakers must account for this gap and implement provisions to ensure these communities are not left behind due to their rental status and associated financial, cultural, and knowledge disparities.

#### Complex intersectionality

For migrant communities, electrification is not a standalone issue. It has complex intersectionality with their struggles of settling down and the pressures of meeting everyday needs. Meeting the cost of transition should also be seen in light of the increasing cost of living.

*“I live in an accommodation managed by the University. Even though I pay the rent and hold the electricity account, I am not allowed to change the energy provider. Through Energy Made Easy, I found that I could save up to 40% of my energy bill by switching the provider. However, I am not allowed to”.*

*(story from one of the Voices for Power community listening sessions held in Parramatta)*

Addressing the complex intersection of tenancy, economic, and knowledge challenges requires a holistic approach. We are worried that these challenges would not be adequately considered in policy development, as there are no systems currently in place to listen to and understand CALD community sentiments in energy transition.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.theenergycharter.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Continuing-Cultural-Connections-WEB-6-1.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.aemc.gov.au/rule-changes/unlocking-CER-benefits-through-flexible-trading>

## CALD communities' aspirations

The lack of trustworthy spaces for CALD communities to participate in the transition creates the danger of migrant clean energy aspirations not being captured and our communities being labelled as climate laggards. Moreover, the country is losing out on utilising CALD communities' knowledge and skills that can help the nation transition more efficiently. We are hearing innovative ideas on the ground, which nobody is listening to.

### Need for Grassroots Investment:

Given the national significance of changes in energy supply and costs affecting daily lives, a deficit-based traditional top-down community engagement strategy will not suffice. Merely translating information and having token CALD representation in policy exhibitions will not address the engagement gap. We strongly advocate for dedicated investment in sustained, grassroots-level engagement with CALD communities. There is a lack of trust, and people are confused about the credibility of information reaching them.

*My (African) community members get hoax calls asking us to switch electricity connections, and they promote solar products. We are confused and afraid of getting scammed. I wonder how these people racially profile us and target us.*

*(story from one of the Voices for Power community listening sessions held at an interagency meeting)*

Strengthening CALD engagement through grassroots organisations will provide trusted spaces for communities to share their concerns, build confidence to participate in energy transition, and provide empirical evidence that can guide the formulation of domestic electrification policies. We urge the government to invest in and partner with grassroots organisations to support active and unforced CALD community participation in residential electrification.

We sincerely appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the Senate inquiry on residential electrification and hope our recommendations will be considered seriously. By addressing the needs and barriers CALD communities face, we can achieve a more equitable and inclusive transition to renewable energy for all Australians. If you have any questions about our comments in this submission or want to discuss this further, please get in touch with Nirmal Joy at [projectofficer@scfonline.org.au](mailto:projectofficer@scfonline.org.au).