

SSI's Public Policy Agenda



Purpose

SSI works both within Australia and internationally to influence policymakers, program designers and the wider community so that the needs of people experiencing disadvantage and inequality can be better met through social policy reform. SSI's Public Policy Agenda provides a foundation for change by building on SSI's strengths and impact and articulating clear positions on key policy areas to inform effective engagement with government and sector stakeholders.

Key Policy Areas

- Addressing the economic participation of migrant and refugee women
- Improving access to income support and essential services among newcomers
- Building sustainable regional migration and settlement
- Strengthening migration and integration
- Bolstering specialisation in human services for a multicultural Australia
- Promoting child development, safety and wellbeing
- Empowering greater choice, control and inclusion for people with disability from culturally diverse backgrounds
- Culturally responsive approaches to addressing domestic and family violence

Cross-cutting themes within each topic area

- First Nations first as a foundation for SSI's approach and understanding of policy issues
- Multiculturalism and social inclusion
- Gender, age (older people/youth) and diversity
- International aspects (such as complementary pathways for refugees)

Policy Areas

Addressing the economic participation of migrant and refugee women

What's it about?

Ensuring that economic participation is not defined by the country you were born in or the language you speak in the home. Research consistently shows that despite being more skilled and qualified, overseas-born Australians lag behind people who are Australian-born in key measures of economic participation. These issues are compounded for migrant and refugee women. In 2023, the Australian Government's White Paper on Employment identified reducing barriers to work as a key policy area; which requires addressing workforce participation disincentives, improving the quality of support for people with disability and promoting gender equality.

Why SSI?

SSI delivers a range of employment support programs across Queensland, NSW and Victoria. SSI has also commissioned research into the economic participation of migrant and refugee women which found marked differences between the economic trajectories of women from OECD countries, women

from low- and middle-income countries and refugee women compared to Australian-born women. A major barrier to unlocking the potential of refugee and migrant women's economic participation is that they are engaged in low-skill, low-paid jobs which are not commensurate with their skills and qualifications. SSI is a partner in several initiatives to support career progression for migrant and refugee women. SSI has also lead research which quantified the cost to the Australian economy of the underutilisation of skills and qualification and is leading advocacy to make skills and qualification recognition less complex, fairer and more affordable to newcomers.

Improving access to income support and essential services among newcomers

What's it about?

Governments should seek to create a sense of belonging by granting people, regardless of visa type, equal access to fundamental rights and opportunities and a safety net in times of need. The independent Migration System Review released in 2023 found that temporary and permanent migrants are strong net contributors to Australia but have unrealised potential. The Review recommended a series of reforms including reviewing access to income support and improving access to essential services for permanent migrants and stronger safeguards for temporary migrants.

Why SSI?

SSI's credibility comes from our service delivery to newcomers across a range of human services and our research with newly arrived refugees (including Foundations for Belonging). This topic explores newcomers' access to essential services and the safety net with a distinct focus on permanent and temporary migrants.

Building sustainable regional migration and settlement

What's it about?

How do we encourage migration and settlement outside of the major cities? What would it take to support sustainable settlement of migrants and refugees in regional areas? The Migration System Review released in 2023 found that regional Australia is often locked out of the migration system because of the system's complexity and detachment from regional development planning. The Review recommends a stronger focus on place-based solutions in migration program planning in conjunction with states and territories. We know that current policy approaches – which rely heavily on visa settings (e.g. mandatory periods of residence in regional areas) – are not fit-for-purpose as many move to major cities once mandatory conditions have been met. This highlights the need for a greater focus on retention and supporting lasting connections for newcomers in regional areas that benefit them and the communities where they settle.

Why SSI?

SSI has a strong opportunity to leverage existing work in regional areas of Australia including our delivery of settlement services and Work + Stay: a social enterprise working to build sustainable regional communities through migration. We also have strong evidence in this area (e.g., evaluation of the Humanitarian Settlement Program in Armidale, host community attitudes research with UNE). Together, our experience in regional areas give us a distinct perspective, clear calls to action, strong credibility and evidence to support our positions.

Strengthening migration and integration

What's it about?

Ensuring fairer migration pathways that safeguard newcomers and give them the best possible chance to reach their potential in Australia irrespective of their visa status. The Migration Strategy released in 2024 by the Australian Government in response to the Migration System Review includes a set of actions to ensure that there is more

clarity and less complexity in temporary migration settings. In addition, the Multicultural Framework Review outlined a reform agenda requiring a whole-of-government and community approach that will position Australia to realise its full potential as a nation made up of many cultures, faiths and lived experiences.

Why SSI?

This is a long-term and critical issue with far-reaching impacts on our communities. With several major policy reviews pointing to ways to strengthen migration and advance integration for newcomers in Australia, the timing is right to take action.

SSI has strong credibility and evidence relating to settlement support and integration drawing on our significant settlement service delivery experience and research. While others such as FECCA and SCOA work on issues relating to pathways from temporary to permanent migration, SSI being a major provider of human services to newcomers brings a unique perspective and voice on this critical issue (while working in partnership with these peaks to amplify as appropriate).

Bolstering specialisation in human services for a multicultural Australia

What's it about?

Australia adopted multiculturalism in the 1970s which, in contrast to White Australia policy, sought to value and respond to cultural diversity. One of the manifestations of multiculturalism was a gradual evolution towards specialised programs and services for multicultural communities, often delivered by multicultural or ethno-specific organisations, including specialised settlement programs for newly-arrived refugees. The Multicultural Framework Review commissioned by the Australian Government noted that investment in specialised multicultural and ethno-specific responses has waned in recent decades and put forward a set of recommendations to ensure that multiculturalism fits Australia's current context, embraces Australians' multifaceted identities and how they engage with the social services and support they seek.

Why SSI?

SSI's deep experience in specialisation is reflected in its long-standing role in supporting refugees' and migrants' settlement and integration. From this specialisation, SSI

generates program and research evidence relating to settlement support and integration, including in regional areas. SSI's specialisation also extends to human services in disability services and employment support across Queensland, NSW and Victoria. As a major provider of a range of human services to newcomers SSI is able to draw on experience to generate insights to improve human services' responsiveness to diverse communities.

Promoting child development, safety and wellbeing

What's it about?

The early life circumstances of children – including parental income, mental health and employment and the communities where they live – strongly predict outcomes throughout the life course. Many children who miss out on early childhood education and enter school developmentally vulnerable fail to catch up. Stronger Starts Brighter Futures research has found that children from culturally diverse backgrounds have lower rates of attendance at early childhood education and are more likely to be developmentally vulnerable when they start school. There is also a well-established

link between child maltreatment and neglect and poor outcomes in later adolescence and adulthood for children who need statutory care. Children and families from culturally diverse backgrounds often face additional challenges in child protection and out-of-home care systems; requiring tailored approaches that meaningfully respond to culture, language, faith and settlement circumstances.

Why SSI?

As a child safe organisation, SSI can build and leverage its substantial record of previous and ongoing work with families in settlement, Community Hubs and preserving and supporting families and children in out-of-home care. Our evidence base in this area includes Stronger Starts Brighter Futures which examines the early development trajectories of children from CALD backgrounds nationally. While other organisations are leads in policy and advocacy on children, our distinctive focus and unique perspective is on the development, safety and wellbeing of migrant and refugee children. The Australian Government has developed a national Early Years Strategy which is taking an integrated approach to the early years and is a key opportunity for policy influence.



Empowering greater choice, control and inclusion for people with disability from culturally diverse backgrounds

What's it about?

Ten years after its establishment, two major policy reviews – the Disability Royal Commission and the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Review, have created a watershed moment for policy reform to improve the inclusion of people with disability and a roadmap for the NDIS. The uptake of the NDIS among people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds continues to be much lower than the rest of the Australian population, despite having similar rates of profound or severe disability. The National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) projected that by 2019, around 20% of NDIS participants would be from CALD backgrounds; however, in March 2024, the proportion of culturally diverse participants receiving an NDIS plan was only 9.0 per cent. In response the NDIS has co-designed a new comprehensive CALD Strategy and Action Plan 2024-28, with a series of actions to improve cultural and linguistically diverse participants' access to, and outcomes from the scheme.



Why SSI?

SSI has delivered programs in disability for more than 10 years including a range of other initiatives to improve inclusion of people with disability from culturally diverse backgrounds. Currently, SSI delivers Local Area Coordination services in two areas of NSW, that encompass communities with the largest population of cultural and linguistically diverse people. LAC services help eligible people with disability to understand and access the NDIS. SSI has built on its record of expertise and experience to broaden its impact by leading work involving people with lived experience, employers, peak employment bodies and decision makers to advance the economic participation of people with disability; strongly positioning itself to influence policy in relation to people with disability from culturally diverse backgrounds.

Culturally responsive approaches to addressing domestic and family violence

What's it about?

While all communities in Australia experience domestic and family violence (DFV), pre-migration trauma and post-migration difficulties can contribute to an increased risk of DFV among newcomers. Further, women from CALD backgrounds who experience DFV experience additional barriers to access the support they need to maintain their safety and may only present to services late and in crisis. The Australian community continues to call for governments to act, including to make a greater commitment to fully implement the National Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032. There is greater understanding that culturally responsive approaches are needed to effectively address DFV among culturally diverse communities.

Why SSI?

SSI provides specialised DFV services that support health and wellbeing, and safety and stability for people from culturally diverse backgrounds. These services include 99 Steps, a free and confidential support for women from migrant and refugee backgrounds affected by DFV in the Logan and Beenleigh areas of Queensland. SSI also operates the NSW Multicultural Centre for Women's and Family Safety which promotes culturally appropriate, evidence-based and community informed responses to domestic, family and sexual violence in NSW, including in regional and rural areas. SSI has also conducted research to test culturally tailored, screening and response to DFV in settlement services. This breadth of experience of service delivery and evidence makes SSI well-placed to advocate for culturally responsive policy and practice to address DFV.

For further information please contact Stakeholder Relations, Research & Policy.
ssi.org.au

SSI acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians and Traditional Custodians of the lands where we live, learn and work.