

SSi's Public Policy Agenda 2022–2023

March 2023

Purpose

SSi provides thought leadership, advocacy and policy influence and aims to influence public policy through discussion and awareness of public policy, access and equity issues. This Public Policy Agenda provides a foundation for SSI advocacy and a coherent set of asks that build on the strengths of the SSI Group. The public policy agenda focuses on articulating clear policy positions on critical issues for long-term external engagement with government and sector stakeholders.

Key Topic Areas

- Addressing the economic participation of newcomers
- Access to income support and essential services
- Regional migration and settlement
- Migration and integration
- Child safety and wellbeing

Cross-cutting themes within each topic area

- Multiculturalism and social inclusion
- Gender, age (older people/youth) and diversity
- Disability
- International aspects (such as complementary pathways for refugees)

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.

Topic Areas

Addressing the economic participation of newcomers

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 overseas-born Australians are more skilled and qualified than Australian-born people yet they lag other Australians in key measures of economic participation.

SSI launched Unlocking Potential Policy Brief in Dec 2022 on migrant and refugee women's economic participation. Unlocking Potential has a set of asks that align with the Government's agenda of increasing women's economic participation that are being amplified as the first paper for the Policy Agenda, while we await the outcomes significant policy review processes currently underway (e.g. the White Paper on Employment, the inquiry into Workforce Australia, review into women's economic participation, migration review) which are due to be finalised in late 2023.

Why SSI?

SSI delivers employment support (e.g. Local Jobs Program in QLD and NSW, Jobs Victoria, RESP in NSW, ParentsNext in QLD and NSW), HSP and NSP have a role in settlement and employment and we have a new industry-specific program in workforce development of the Home Care workforce in the ACT/ NSW. Relatively little research and policy attention has been paid to how we improve the economic participation of newcomers, especially those already in Australia. Recent research commissioned by SSI found persistent marked difference 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. We know that increasing women's economic participation is front of mind across all Government portfolios and we can take these key set of asks to government and work to amplify across our sector.

Access to income support and essential services

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.

Why SSI?

SSI has credibility, from our service delivery and research (including Foundations for Belonging) and a clear call to action in this area. While others (e.g. ACOSS) are working on broader issues relating to income support, our distinctive focus will be on issues impacting on newcomers and CALD communities. This topic will also explore access to essential services including those with and without permanent residency.



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?

Why SSI?

SSI has a strong opportunity to leverage existing work (e.g., Work + Stay, HSP, NSP, CE). We also have strong evidence in this area (e.g. evaluation of the HSP in Armidale, host community attitudes research with UNE, forthcoming evaluation of the NSP). Together, our experience in regional work gives us a distinct perspective, clear calls to action, strong credibility and evidence to support our positions.

There is a window of opportunity for policy influence with the change in Government and the new Minister expressing interest in this issue. At the same time, it is a critical, long-term issue. We know that current policy approaches are not working - for example, Grattan Institute data shows that when migrants and refugees settle in regional

areas (e.g. to meet regional visa requirements) they are more likely to move to major cities over time than people born in Australia. 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.

SSI has strong credibility and evidence relating to settlement support and integration drawing on our significant settlement service delivery experience (e.g. HSP, NSP) and research (e.g. Foundations). While there are others such as FECCA and SCOA working on issues relating to pathways from temporary to permanent migration, SSI is a major provider of human services to newcomers that can add our unique voice on this critical issue (while working in partnership with these peaks to amplify as appropriate).

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.

Why SSI?

This is a long-term and critical issue with far-reaching impacts on our constituencies. The time is right and there is opportunity for policy influence as we emerge from the pandemic, given the public commentary of the new government in relation to improving migration pathways and harnessing the potential of newcomers.

Child safety and wellbeing

What's it about?

How do we support disadvantaged children, particularly CALD children, to recover from the setbacks of the COVID-19 pandemic? Data from the Australian Early Development Index shows CALD children start school developmentally behind their peers. How do we address this gap?

Why SSI?

There is substantial existing work we can leverage and build on including our work in the HSP, NSP and Community Hubs with families and our work in Out-of-Home Care. We also have an evidence base in this area including a new research report on Culturally Diverse Children and OOHC; and Stronger Starts Brighter Futures which examines the early development trajectories of children from CALD backgrounds nationally. We have a unique perspective - while there are other organisations leading policy and advocacy on addressing the impacts of the pandemic on children our distinctive focus is on the safety and wellbeing of migrant and refugee

children. In the October mini-Budget the Government committed to developing a whole-of-Commonwealth Early Years Strategy which will take an integrated approach to the early years and will be a key opportunity for policy influence.

For further information please contact Stakeholder Relations, Research & Policy.
[ssi.org.au](https://www.ssi.org.au)