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SSI Gender Equity Strategy 2024-2027

Advancing gender justice:
Transforming the lives of women and girls
in all their diversity

February 2025

SSI For equality
of life.

Acknowledgement of Country

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

Australia is home to more than over 250 Indigenous clans. The Indigenous political, cultural and economic knowledge systems are mostly operated under a matriarchal structure that is ethical, autonomous and in synergy with nature, people and animals.

Women teach the songlines and language, bestowing on future generations a sense of their identity. These songlines help children to navigate the world with one hand on a common thread that leads back to their ancestors and the Dreamtime. We pay respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their custodianship and care for the land, water, sky and Peoples for over 65,000 years.

We remain committed to reconciliation and to working with First Nations peoples to realise Makarrata – a Yolngu word meaning the coming together after a struggle.

Foreword

Violet Roumeliotis, SSI CEO

I am pleased to introduce SSI's second Gender Equity Strategy aimed at transforming women's lives through gender justice initiatives and transformative processes. This strategy is crucial to the heart of the work that SSI does as an advocate, employer, service delivery agency and a voice for all women and girls.

Since the first three-year strategic plan, we have achieved an incredible amount of success through the uplift of initiatives focused on women and girls across SSI. SSI stands uniquely as one of the few non-government organisations to have made this level of strategic commitment to gender equity and we are proud to role model this dedication to our communities.

This strategy provides us with an opportunity to invest in our communities as well as enhance our internal practices and culture. It will provide us with a north star to ensure accountability as we track, measure and evaluate our progression towards gender equity.

I look forward to seeing the outcomes that will arise from this strategy.

Introduction

Our commitment to gender equity is informed by the robust policy environment that SSI operates within (page 6), which acknowledges that women have complex and nuanced identities other than their gender – such as their ethnicity, class, ability and sexual orientation.

This strategy builds on SSI's 2021-2023 Women and Girl's Strategic Plan and the subsequent evaluation of this plan and consultation with staff. This strategy effectively lifted the profile of the needs of women and girls into 'business as usual' at SSI.

The evaluation highlighted some areas for improvement with specific focus on opportunities for economic participation for female clients and staff, gender justice within our workplace and increased focus on advocacy and policy work for under-represented women and girls.

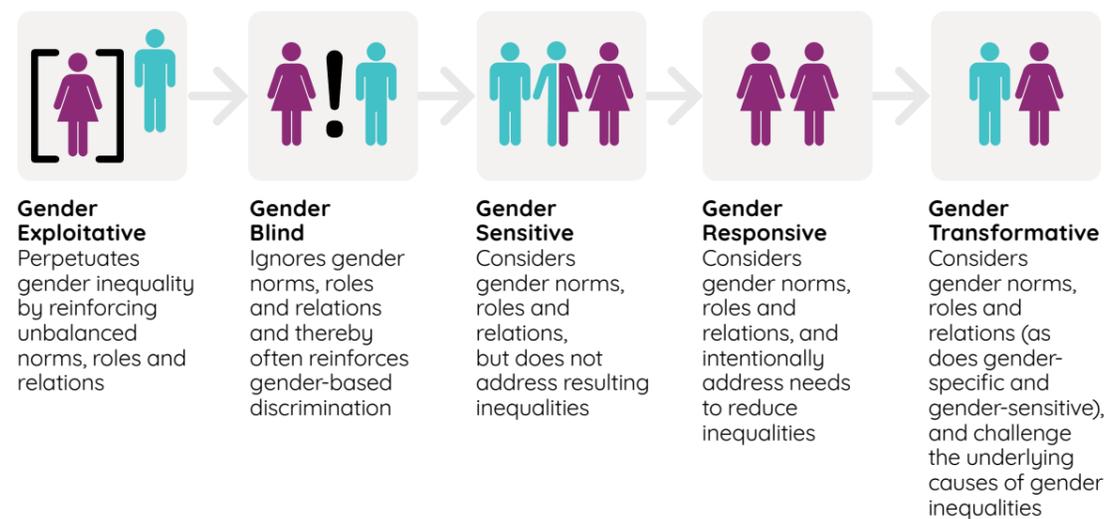
The feedback received in consultations and evaluations has informed the goals and actions for this strategy.

This strategy follows a gender transformative approach working towards gender justice

Gender justice focuses on redistributing power and resources to make systems fairer for everyone, because gender roles negatively impact both women and men, especially those with intersecting identities (i.e. race, ethnicity, visa status, gender and sexual diversity, faith and religion, and ability).

A gender transformative approach would benefit people of any gender by moving away from traditional gender roles that negatively impact everyone, see Figure 1.

Figure 1. Gender Integration Continuum



Source: UNFPA, 2023. Gender Transformative Approaches to Achieve Gender Equality and Sexual and Productive Health and Rights. Technical Note.

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Goal 1: Increased economic participation

Economic participation is the most important determinant necessary for women and girls to build their own independence and individual capacity¹. Women from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds face unique barriers to economic participation. These include a lack of networks and social capital; limited

local experience and/or qualifications including recognition of qualification barriers; language barriers, traditional perception of female roles and racism and discrimination. All programs in SSI can play a role in empowering women and girls to achieve their economic goals.

Outcome 1: Women in the organisation have access to strategies and models to improve their economic participation.	Outcome 2: Women and girls are empowered to achieve economic goals.	Outcome 3: Women and girl clients are networked within their chosen field.
<p>Indicators:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Level of understanding of impact of economic participation and avenues for participation (# of participants attend presentations/ consultations, # of documents and reports, literature review). Level of consensus and engagement in the process of designing the model (measured by # of programs participating and # of meetings, engagement measures in general). 	<p>Indicators:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence of strategies in each client program aimed at enhancing the potential for increased economic participation (results of the impact measurement work of the employment learning and growth domain). Increase in SSI female clients identifying interest in career development. 20% of actions outlined in economic client participation model (referenced in outcome one) are actioned by SSI service delivery teams # of women placed in roles within their qualified field. 	<p>Indicators:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Number of networking opportunities attended and participant numbers. High engagement scores from networking events and groups.
<p>Actions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Develop an economic client participation model. Collect metrics and qualitative input from the process. 	<p>Actions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate implementation of economic client participation model across programs. Recognise and identify the intersections with staff development. Programs embrace model and implement stage by stage. 	<p>Actions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Develop networking opportunities across SSI based upon common interests. Embed networking opportunities across client-facing programs. Develop standardised metric for tracking participation and engagement of women and girls.

¹ <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/projects/3-theme-one-economic-independence-women-listening-tour-report>



Goal 2: Continue to apply a gendered lens in SSI's advocacy and policy work

Advocating for women and girls continues to be a key component of SSI's work, with champions across the organisation advocating for equitable treatment for clients and communities, along with systemic

policy reforms. Evaluating the impact of the previous strategy illustrated the need to focus our efforts on systemic advocacy for women and girls with multiple intersecting identity factors.

Outcome 1: Gender lens embedded into all programs and functional units.	Outcome 2: Secured commitment from the organisation to run gender-based initiatives.	Outcome 3: A robust advocacy strategy developed for three cohorts of women and girls with intersecting needs.
Indicators: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> % of events/projects where gender is considered in the planning. Gendered impacts are assessed annually within SSI service delivery areas. 	Indicators: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Endorsement of Gender Equity Strategy 2024-2027. Evidence of budget allocations to support gender initiatives. 	Indicators: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Number of position papers/policy papers/government submissions made on identified cohorts. Number of consultations attended as subject matter experts.
Actions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Develop SSI Champions of Gender Justice to promote advocacy work. Establish a Community of Practice for Champions. 	Actions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Each program allocates budget, in-kind or in funding, to gender-based initiatives. Consideration of a central budget item that programs can apply to for women-specific activities. 	Actions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Develop separate strategies and plans for each cohort based on research to cover three years. Develop advocacy skills with women interested in advocating for these cohorts. Attend community events/consultations focused on issues for these cohorts. Identify groups that SSI has low levels of engagement with and where growth of services could be considered.



Goal 3: Ensuring gender justice in our workplace

As a female-dominated organisation with equity at its very foundation, SSI already enjoys an enviable position towards gender equity within its workforce. This strategy will ensure that we do not take our finger of

the pulse – applying an equity lens across the entire employee lifecycle, strengthening governance mechanisms and taking a progressive approach to women's wellbeing and safety.

Outcome 1: Gender lens applied across the breadth of the employee lifecycle.	Outcome 2: Equitable development and career opportunities for women.	Outcome 3: Female staff experience high levels of wellbeing in the workplace.
Indicators: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> People processes including recruitment, remuneration, talent development and engagement analysed by gender. Reporting and accountability methods implemented for all stages. Continuing to meet or steps taken to improve all six Gender Equity Indicators. 	Indicators: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Improvements in distribution of leadership roles across the organisation at all levels to reflect the gender profile of the overall workforce (%) (GEI 1) * Number of females identified for internal mobility (talent pools) and senior leader career pathways reflects the gender profile of the overall workforce (%). Take up of career advancement opportunities (% of women with development activities identified and # of people commencing the experience). 	Indicators: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Improved wellbeing results for women in the 2026 Your Voice Survey (%). Increased female utilisation of EAP (# cases).
Actions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Assess and strengthen the reporting and governance model for gender-related outcomes. Capture other diversity data to start to enable analysis of intersectionality and its impact on the female employee experience. Establish an employee-led Impact Group focused on improving outcomes for female-identifying employees at SSI. (GEI 5) 	Actions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Identify pockets of inequity (within divisions or specific interventions) and provide targeted initiatives to address them. Explore mentoring, coaching and sponsorship opportunities for female employees. Explore non-traditional leadership role design e.g. job-share, remote, part-time. 	Actions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure contemporary family-friendly policies are accessible and utilised across the organisation. (GEI 4) Targeted initiatives for women's wellbeing offered throughout the period. Amendments to policy and practice to mitigate sexual harassment in the workplace. (GEI 6) Ensure onboarding and relevant training includes reference to the Plan.

* GEI = Gender Equality Indicator from Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012

Environmental Data Scan related to the Strategy

2021 census data	48.2% Australians have a parent born overseas ⁽¹⁾
	27.6% report a birthplace from overseas ⁽¹⁾
Employment rate of females in the labor market	59% of Australian-born women are in employment ⁽²⁾
	52% of women from low and middle-income countries are in employment ⁽²⁾
	33% of women from refugee-source countries are in employment ⁽²⁾
Unemployment rate in female labor market	The unemployment rate for women who have migrated to Australia sits at 6.29% , compared with 5.40% for all Australian women and migrant men ⁽³⁾
Underemployment rate among part-time female workers	40% Australian-born part-time workers want to work full time, while 48% part-time workers want more part-time work ⁽³⁾
	47% women from low and middle-income countries that work part-time, want to work full-time, while 32% part-time workers want more part-time work ⁽²⁾
	95% women from refugee-source countries that work part-time, want to work full-time, while 23% part-time workers want more part-time work ⁽²⁾
	Skilled female migrants are 1.2 times more likely to be underutilised than migrant males ⁽⁴⁾
Female education rate	Women born overseas are on average better educated than Australian-born women ⁽²⁾
	Refugee women's participation in higher education is similar to Australian-born women's participation ⁽²⁾
Female participation rate in labor market	The labour force participation rate of women who have migrated to Australia sits at 66.95% , compared to 68.53% of all women in Australia and 78.94% of migrant men ⁽⁵⁾
	Unpaid care and support work impacts economic security, including the gender pay gap with a third of the pay gap attributed to the time spent caring for family and interruptions in full-time employment ⁽⁵⁾
	Women make up 72% of primary carers to people with disability and older people ⁽⁵⁾
	35% of female primary carers have a disability themselves ⁽⁵⁾
	Over a fifth of refugees work in the health care and social assistance sectors ⁽⁵⁾
	Migrant and refugee women are more likely to work in low income, low skill, insecure jobs, and CALD women also have a significantly lower rate of workforce participation ⁽⁶⁾

Workforce at SSI	73% of SSI staff are women ⁽⁷⁾
	65% SSI employees participated in Your Voice staff engagement survey, out of which 66.6% identified as female ⁽⁷⁾
	49% of staff were born outside of Australia ⁽⁷⁾
	19.8% are from a refugee background or have experienced forced displacement ⁽⁷⁾
	41% stated that their primary language is a language other than English ⁽⁷⁾
	34% SSI staff are 36-45 years old and 4% SSI staff are 25 years old or under ⁽⁷⁾
Female client participation in SSI employment programs	In the Disability Employment Services, the female client participation rate is 50% ⁽⁸⁾
	In the Refugee Employment Support Program, the female client participation rate was 44.73% ⁽⁸⁾
The policy environment SSI operates within	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Australian Government's Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality ● National Women's Health Strategy 2020-2030 ● The National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032 ● Universal Declaration of Human Rights ● Sustainable Development Goals ● The principles of intersectional feminism

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021 Census <https://www.abs.gov.au/media-centre/media-releases/2021-census-nearly-half-australians-have-parent-born-overseas>
2. Unlocking Potential: Addressing the economic participation of migrant and refugee women in Australia Policy Brief https://www.ssi.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/OP_Unlocking_Potential_Policy_Brief.pdf
3. Harmony Alliance <https://www.harmonyalliance.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Retirement-Income-Review-Submission.pdf>
4. Billion Dollar Benefit <https://www.harmonyalliance.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Retirement-Income-Review-Submission.pdf>
5. Working for Women- A Strategy for Gender Equality <https://www.harmonyalliance.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Retirement-Income-Review-Submission.pdf>
6. Workplace Gender Equality Agency <https://www.wgea.gov.au/gender-equality-and-diversity>
7. Your Voice 2024
8. SSI GenderBased Analysis of programs



SSI celebrates International Womens Day 2024

SSI's NSW Multicultural Centre for Women's and Family Safety 2025

We're SSI.
We stand for a world in which everyone
has access to equal opportunity.
We are driven by equality, empathy,
and celebration of every individual.
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