



Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia

Inquiry into the value of skilled migration to Australia

26 January 2026



FECCA pays its respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past and present and recognise the land we live and work upon was never ceded. FECCA proudly supports the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

FECCA acknowledges that our work on behalf of multicultural Australia has learnt from and been enriched by First Nations peoples and organisations. We are committed to continuing to listen, learn and support First Nations peoples in the journey to a more inclusive society.

Who we are

The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) is the national peak body representing people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities and their organisations across Australia. Through its membership of state, territory and regional ethnic communities' councils, FECCA represents more than 1,500 multicultural community organisations nationwide and provides a collective national voice on issues including migration, settlement, workforce participation, skills recognition, social cohesion and equity.

FECCA's work is informed by its work as a peak body of multicultural organisations, peak body in ageing and aged care, and through its two initiatives: 1) the Australian Multicultural Women's Alliance (AMWA), the national voice for multicultural women, and 2) the Australian Multicultural Health Collaborative (AMHC), the multicultural health peak.

AMWA brings lived-experience insights from migrant, refugee and multicultural women, highlighting barriers such as visa insecurity, racism, language, digital exclusion and system navigation that must be addressed in reform design. It aims to empower women from all multicultural backgrounds to thrive and contribute fully to Australia's prosperity.

AMHC provides a national voice, leadership and advice on policy, research, data, and practice to improve access and equity, address systemic racism, and achieve better health and wellbeing outcomes for Australians from multicultural backgrounds.

What we do

For over 40 years, FECCA has worked in partnership with culturally and linguistically diverse communities, governments and stakeholders to support a successful, productive and inclusive multicultural Australia. FECCA draws on lived experience, community-level evidence and policy expertise to develop and promote inclusive, evidence-based public policy that reflects the realities and contributions of multicultural Australia.

FECCA's work is grounded in the principle that migration and multiculturalism are nation-building, and that inclusive systems—particularly in employment, skills recognition and settlement—are essential to Australia's long-term economic and social prosperity. Through research, policy advice, stakeholder engagement and co-design, FECCA seeks to ensure that Australia's systems enable migrants to contribute at their full capability and participate equitably in economic and civic life.

Foreword

FECCA, AMWA and AMHC welcome the opportunity to contribute to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration's Inquiry into the value of skilled migration to Australia. Skilled migration is central to Australia's economic resilience, service delivery and long-term prosperity, yet systemic barriers continue to limit skills recognition, workforce participation and retention—particularly for migrants from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Drawing on community-grounded evidence and policy analysis, this submission highlights the need for integrated, system-wide reform and affirms FECCA's readiness to partner with government and stakeholders to unlock underutilised talent and strengthen Australia's skilled migration system.

For inquiries, please contact FECCA CEO Mary Ann Baquero Geronimo

Background

This submission draws on extensive policy, research and community-sector experience examining skilled migration, workforce participation, and the economic and social inclusion of migrants in Australia. It builds on evidence previously provided to Commonwealth reviews on workforce and skills governance, including the *Review of the Jobs and Skills Australia Act 2022*, and reflects sustained engagement with skills recognition, labour-market integration, settlement, and social cohesion. It also draws on FECCA's ongoing engagement with disability advocacy organisations and evidence concerning the intersection of migration, disability and workforce participation.

This submission also draws on the outcomes of the Australian Multicultural Women's Alliance (AMWA) Skills Recognition Survey,¹ which captured the lived experiences of migrant and refugee women across a range of visa categories, professions and regions in Australia. The survey focused on skills recognition pathways, workforce participation, costs, timeframes and employment outcomes, and is supplemented by qualitative responses detailing the impacts of skills underutilisation on economic security, wellbeing and career progression. These findings are consistent with broader evidence showing that gender, visa status and disability intersect to shape labour-market outcomes for migrants.

Australia's workforce is at a critical juncture. Despite a persistent national skills crisis—**where around one in three occupations is in shortage**—there remains a significant mismatch between skills supply and utilisation (Activate Australia's Skills, 2025). Evidence shows that approximately **44 per cent of permanent migrants work below their skill level**, and that **60 per cent of these underutilised workers entered through the skilled migration program**, representing an estimated **\$9 billion in foregone economic activity each year** (Deloitte Access Economics, 2024). This points to systemic inefficiencies, rather than individual deficits, within Australia's migration, skills and employment systems. However, these aggregate statistics obscure important intersectional inequalities, particularly for migrants with disability, who remain largely invisible in workforce and migration data.

These systemic pressures are particularly acute for temporary and employer-dependent migrants, for whom visa insecurity, limited job mobility and geographic isolation increase vulnerability to labour exploitation, including modern slavery (SBS, 2026). Recent scrutiny by Australia's Anti-Slavery Commissioner has highlighted how certain temporary and training visa settings can actively drive vulnerability to forced labour, reinforcing the need for targeted visa reform alongside stronger and more accessible protections within Australia's skilled and training-related migration settings (Houlbrook-Walk & Smith, 2026).

Research further demonstrates that overseas skills and qualifications recognition in Australia is frequently **bureaucratic, expensive, fragmented and outdated**, limiting migrants' ability to contribute at their full capability (Settlement Services International [SSI], 2024). These barriers constrain productivity and competitiveness, while also exacerbating shortages in critical sectors such as health, aged care, disability services, education, construction and regional service delivery. For

¹ The AMWA Skills Recognition Survey was conducted in August 2024. Findings will be published in a forthcoming report in April 2026 and will also inform an ongoing research project on skills recognition for migrant and refugee women being undertaken with SSI, drawing on internal survey data not yet published. Relevant related work includes: AMWA (2025a, 2025b), AMWA & NWEA (2025).

migrants with disability—particularly those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds—these barriers are compounded by ableism, inaccessible workplaces, discriminatory recruitment practices and limited access to reasonable adjustments.

Evidence from the Multicultural Framework Review report, *Towards Fairness: A Multicultural Australia for All*, indicates that underutilisation of skilled migrants is driven less by capacity or willingness to work than by **structural exclusion within workplaces**, including recruitment bias, overemphasis on “Australian work experience”, and unreasonable or costly skills and English-language recognition requirements (Department of Home Affairs, 2024). This is a missed opportunity for employees, employers and the broader economy. Notably, permanent skilled migrants demonstrate **strong labour-market participation and fiscal contribution**, with employment rates exceeding the national average (81.2 per cent compared to 61.5 per cent) and an estimated lifetime fiscal contribution of **\$198,000 per person** to Australian governments (ibid).

FECCA’s long-standing position is that migration and multiculturalism are fundamentally **nation-building**, not merely short-term labour-market levers. Skilled migration delivers sustained value only when economic objectives are supported by inclusive policy settings, including effective settlement services, protection from exploitation, clear pathways to permanency, and recognition of bilingual and bicultural skills. These settings must also explicitly support migrants with disability through accessible workplaces, culturally safe adjustment processes and protection from discrimination. Family reunion and secure settlement underpin workforce participation, retention and productivity, and in turn contribute to stronger social cohesion.

This submission adopts a **systems-based perspective**, arguing that skilled migration delivers sustained value when economic objectives are supported by inclusive policy settings, including effective settlement services, protection from exploitation, clear pathways to permanency, and recognition of bilingual and bicultural skills. When disability inclusion is not embedded across these systems, migrants with disability face compounded exclusion, increased exploitation risk and prolonged deskilling. When these elements operate in isolation, Australia risks productivity losses, de-skilling, exploitation, declining trust in the migration program, and weak social cohesion.

Within this context, **Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA)** is well placed to help close the gap between skills and jobs. To deliver equitable outcomes for multicultural communities, workforce and migration governance reforms must embed multicultural inclusion and skills recognition as **core, measurable functions**, supported by disaggregated workforce data, transparent skills-recognition pathways, and structured engagement with multicultural peak bodies and community stakeholders. This must include improved data collection on disability across migration and labour-market systems, disaggregated by visa status, gender and ethnicity, in line with Australia’s obligations under Article 27 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

Organisations such as FECCA and its members play a critical role in this ecosystem by providing community-grounded evidence, convening diverse stakeholders, and supporting co-design, implementation and evaluation of workforce and skills reforms. This includes working with disability advocacy organisations to ensure that migrants with disability are recognised as a priority cohort within workforce participation strategies, that the Migration Health Requirement is reviewed as a structural barrier to inclusion, and that anti-discrimination protections are meaningfully enforced for

visa-linked workers. Leveraging this expertise will be essential to ensuring policy settings translate into meaningful, on-the-ground outcomes for skilled migrants, employers and Australian communities.

2. Response to the Terms of Reference²

(a) The ongoing economic, social and cultural value of skilled migration

Skilled migration remains a critical contributor to Australia's economy, public services, and long-term prosperity. In the context of population ageing and persistent skills shortages, skilled migrants support productivity growth, business continuity, and service delivery—particularly in health, aged care, disability services, education, construction, engineering, and regional economies (Activate Australia's Skills, 2025).

CEDA also highlighted in its 2022 report *Jobs & Skills Summit: Unlocking skilled migration* that, "skilled migration has facilitated the transfer of knowledge, skills and international connections to Australian workers and businesses, including in areas such as advanced manufacturing" (p. 4).

However, current outcomes reveal a substantial **underutilisation of skilled migrants' capabilities**. Evidence shows that approximately **44 per cent of permanent migrants work below their skill level**, with around **60 per cent of these migrants having entered via skilled pathways**, resulting in an estimated **\$9 billion in foregone economic activity each year** (Deloitte Access Economics, 2024).

AMWA's survey of migrant and refugee women reflects this reality with **nearly 60 per cent of respondents reporting that they were not employed in roles aligned with their overseas qualifications**, despite most holding tertiary or postgraduate degrees. Participants represented professions including health, education, engineering, law and business, and spanned skilled, family, temporary and humanitarian visa pathways.

Taken together, this evidence points to a systemic failure rather than individual capability gaps. An estimated **621,000 skilled migrants are underutilised in the Australian labour force**, with migrant women 1.2 times more likely to be underutilised than men, and migrants from the Global South experiencing significantly higher underutilisation rates (Activate Australia's Skills, 2024). These outcomes are driven by persistent barriers including skills recognition and licensing processes, cost and time delays, the devaluation of overseas experience, and limited access to childcare and social security for women on temporary and dependent visas—representing a significant and avoidable productivity loss to Australia.

Further, skilled migrants with disability remain entirely absent from workforce data and policy settings. Australia's obligations under Article 27 of the CRPD extend to all people with disability, regardless of migration status, requiring States Parties to "safeguard and promote the realisation of the right to work" through accessible employment services, reasonable accommodations, and protection from discrimination (United Nations, 2006, Article 27). Yet skilled migrants with disability face compounded barriers: inaccessible skills recognition processes that fail to provide reasonable

² This section synthesises evidence and recommendations from FECCA's Jobs & Skills Summit Issues Paper (2022) and its Multicultural Framework Review (2024), together with SSI's Skilled & Ready report (2024).

adjustments, employment discrimination based on both disability and cultural background, and settlement services that rarely accommodate disability access needs (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2016; NEDA, ongoing advocacy). The absence of disability-disaggregated data within migration and workforce statistics renders this cohort invisible, perpetuating systemic exclusion and contravening Australia's human rights commitments (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022).

Key implication: Skilled migration should be understood not merely as a labour-market lever, but as a **long-term nation-building investment**. Its full economic and social value is realised only when gendered barriers to skills recognition and workforce participation are addressed, through inclusive and well-coordinated policy settings that support secure settlement, family reunion and equitable workforce participation. Without this approach, Australia risks continued skills underutilisation, reduced productivity and weakened social cohesion.

Recommendations

1. **Measure skilled migration success by skills utilisation and retention, and equity across intersecting identities not intake alone.** Government should supplement headline migration figures with indicators on skills recognition outcomes, employment commensurate with qualifications, regional retention, and progression over time, and outcomes disaggregated by disability status, gender, country of origin, and visa pathway, to ensure skilled migration delivers its full economic and social value for all migrants.
2. **Embed settlement, family reunion, disability accessibility and social participation as enablers of productivity.** Skilled migration policy should explicitly recognise settlement security, family reunion and social participation as core contributors to workforce participation, retention and long-term economic contribution, rather than treating them as peripheral or discretionary supports.

(b) Effectiveness of current skilled migration settings, recognising housing and infrastructure needs

Public debate often frames migration and housing as competing pressures. This submission argues that the core issue is not migration levels per se, but **weak systems thinking, policy coordination and transparency**.

Skilled migration settings are most effective when they are aligned with:

- housing supply and affordability strategies,
- infrastructure planning at state, territory and local levels, including disability accessible housing and transport, and
- realistic assumptions about settlement and service capacity, including disability supports.

The consequences of poor coordination (Department of Home Affairs, 2023) are felt most acutely at the local and regional level. Persistent skills shortages inflate wages, delay projects and restrict access to essential services—particularly in health, education and construction—while regional Australia faces compounded pressures from chronic job vacancies, housing shortages and thin service coverage. Where migration, housing and regional development strategies are misaligned, skilled migrants are less likely to be retained, constraining long-term regional growth and undermining workforce participation, living stability and public confidence.

Key implication: The effectiveness of skilled migration settings depends on **clear coordination with housing, infrastructure and settlement capacity**, rather than migration being planned in isolation. Transparent, shared planning with states and territories is essential to support workforce participation and regional retention, maintain service delivery, and sustain public confidence in the migration system.

Recommendations

3. **Integrate skilled migration planning with housing and infrastructure and disability service strategies.** Migration planning should be aligned with state and territory housing supply, infrastructure capacity and service planning through transparent, data-driven shared planning mechanisms, rather than being developed in silos.
4. **Publish a clear evidence base linking skilled migration to local capacity.** Government should improve transparency by publishing localised data on settlement patterns, workforce deployment, housing impacts and infrastructure investment, and disability service accessibility, to support informed public discussion and maintain confidence in skilled migration settings.

(c) Targeting skills gaps and shortages in critical sectors

There is strong scope to improve how skilled migration targets genuine skills gaps, particularly in sectors delivering essential services to Australian communities, including health, aged care, disability, education and construction.

Current challenges include:

- structural mismatches between qualifications and employment outcomes;
- fragmented skills recognition and licensing systems;
- systems that fail to accommodate reasonable adjustments for professionals with disability; and
- delayed, opaque and inconsistent pathways into regulated professions.

Australia currently has **over 650 occupations assessed by 39 different assessing authorities and more than 30 licensing bodies**, operating without a single point of national accountability. This fragmentation creates duplication, cost and delay, disproportionately affecting migrants in priority sectors already experiencing acute workforce shortages (SSI, 2024). Skilled migrants with disability face additional barriers when skills recognition and licensing processes fail to provide reasonable adjustments as required under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and the CRPD (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2016).

Barriers preventing skilled migrants from working at their full capacity cost the Australian economy billions of dollars annually (Monash University, 2021). In the health and care workforce, this underutilisation is particularly stark. Many overseas-trained professionals are concentrated in low-paid and insecure roles despite holding qualifications and experience that could directly address workforce shortages. More than half of Australia's aged care workforce is overseas born (AIHW,

2021), with migrant women heavily over-represented in-home care and community support roles characterised by insecure hours and low pay (Charlesworth & Howe, 2018).

Fragmented, costly and lengthy skills recognition processes continue to delay workforce entry for skilled migrants, particularly women in regulated professions such as health, education, law and engineering. AMWA's consultation showed recognition costs ranging from \$8,000 to over \$25,000, with timeframes extending beyond 18 months in some professions. In some cases, total costs can reach up to \$51,000. These delays operate as a "time tax on talent", compounding gendered care responsibilities, visa insecurity and regional disadvantage.

As a result, many highly skilled migrant women are channelled into the care economy as a default pathway rather than through deliberate choice. AMWA surveys and consultations identify qualified engineers, teachers and health professionals working in aged care, disability support and cleaning roles due to prohibitive recognition costs, duplicative checks and delayed licensing processes. This represents a persistent mismatch between Australia's workforce needs and the available skilled migrant talent pool.

These challenges are further compounded by the absence of a nationally consistent recognition framework. Appeals processes often lack transparency or independence, while state-based licensing and mutual recognition arrangements remain uneven across jurisdictions and across aged care, disability, home care and health. The abolition of the federal Assessment Subsidy for Overseas Trained Professionals in 2015 removed a key source of financial support for skills recognition. In the absence of a national loan or subsidy scheme, alongside limited multilingual information and no single authoritative entry point, many CALD migrants continue to face delays in entering the workforce (Activate Australia's Skills, 2024).

Addressing these system-level inefficiencies would unlock significant workforce capacity at a time of acute need, improve skills utilisation, and ensure skilled migration delivers its full economic and social value in critical service sectors.

Key implication: Effective targeting of skills shortages requires **alignment between migration settings and fit-for-purpose skills recognition and licensing systems**. Without coordinated reform to reduce fragmentation, cost and delay, skilled migrants will continue to be underutilised in sectors facing acute shortages, limiting service delivery and productivity gains.

Recommendations

- 5. Strengthen evidence-based targeting of genuine and persistent shortages.**
Skilled migration occupation targeting should be grounded in independent labour-market analysis and service delivery needs, with clear justification for priority sectors such as health, care, education, construction and regional services, and explicit recognition of cultural competence and bilingual capacity as skilled capabilities.
- 6. Pair skilled migration with reform of skills recognition and licensing systems.**
Migration settings should be coordinated with national reform of skills recognition, licensing and bridging pathways to reduce fragmentation, cost and delay, accommodate reasonable

adjustments for professionals with disability, enabling migrants to contribute at their full capability where shortages are most acute.

(d) Supporting Australian businesses, productivity and innovation

Australian businesses benefit most from skilled migration when visa settings:

- are predictable and timely,
- allow sufficient worker mobility to improve job matching,
- protect against exploitation that distorts labour markets'
- and enable workers with disability to access reasonable adjustments and anti-discrimination protections.

Where these conditions are not met, productivity is undermined. Prolonged visa precarity and employer dependency discourage skills investment, limit job mobility, and suppress wages in certain sectors. They also increase the risk of exploitation, underpayment and unsafe work, particularly where migrants fear visa cancellation or adverse consequences if they report abuse.

Recent coronial findings highlight the human cost of structural weaknesses in migrant worker protections. A 2025 NSW coronial inquest into the death of a young trainee migrant worker in an isolated rural workplace identified multiple indicators of forced labour, including excessive unpaid hours, deception regarding training conditions, restricted movement and access to personal documents, and fear of reporting due to employer control. The Coroner found that existing systems failed to provide adequate protection, referred the matter to the Australian Federal Police, and recommended stronger mechanisms for reporting modern slavery, including consideration of a national anti-slavery hotline. This case study underscores how employer-tied visas, geographic isolation and inaccessible reporting pathways heighten exploitation risks, distort labour markets, and undermine worker safety and productivity (SBS, 2026).

For migrant women, these dynamics intersect with gender-based economic vulnerability. AMWA survey findings indicate that delayed or stalled skills recognition contributes to financial dependency, loss of professional identity, and increased exposure to workplace exploitation and domestic and family violence. In this context, skills recognition reform is not only an economic priority, but also a critical gender equity and safety issue.

Complex and lengthy transitions from temporary to permanent visas further exacerbate these risks by discouraging job mobility and deterring the reporting of exploitation (Grattan Institute, 2023). High numbers of migrants on bridging visas experience prolonged uncertainty, limiting long-term career investment. Ties to specific employers or sponsors can further suppress reporting of underpayment, unsafe work or sexual harassment, while delays in recognition pathways frequently push skilled migrants into low-paid roles outside their profession, contributing to de-skilling over time (Unions NSW, 2024).

These dynamics are particularly evident in the care workforce. The AMHC's analysis, outlined in its submission to the Productivity Commission (AMHC, 2025), shows that visa insecurity and fragmented employment arrangements push many migrant workers into low-paid, casualised roles, where risks of underpayment, unsafe work and exploitation are heightened. These outcomes are structurally

linked to limited worker mobility, high employer dependency, and the complexity of transitioning between visa types—issues that similarly affect skilled migrants across multiple sectors.

Such conditions not only suppress wages and productivity, but also discourage skill development and reduce retention in shortage areas. Embedding stronger worker protections, culturally safe workplaces, and more secure migration pathways is essential to enable skilled migrants to move into roles that match their qualifications, improve productivity for employers, and reduce the economic and social costs of exploitation.

Key implication: Skilled migration supports productivity and innovation only when **visa settings promote mobility, security and fairness**. Prolonged visa precarity and employer dependency undermine job matching, skill investment and workforce participation, while increasing exploitation risks. Productivity gains therefore depend on strong integrity settings and clear pathways to permanency, not processing speed alone.

Recommendations

7. **Improve worker mobility and reduce visa dependency within skilled pathways.**

Skilled migration settings should minimise employer dependency and visa precarity to improve job matching, support productivity, and reduce exploitation risks that distort labour markets, and safeguarding in sectors serving vulnerable populations, including disability and aged care services.

8. **Link faster processing to strong integrity and protection settings.**

Efforts to streamline visa processing should be accompanied by robust worker protections, clear pathways to permanency, effective compliance mechanisms and safeguarding frameworks that recognise the intersection of worker vulnerability and client vulnerability in care sectors, to ensure productivity gains are not achieved at the expense of fairness or safety. This should include accessible and trusted reporting mechanisms for migrant workers, such as a nationally coordinated anti-slavery hotline, alongside mandatory training for frontline agencies operating in high-risk and isolated sectors.

(e) Enhancing public awareness and understanding of skilled migration

Public understanding of skilled migration remains uneven and highly sensitive to housing pressures, service access and cost-of-living concerns. Communication strategies that focus only on aggregate economic benefits are insufficient.

Improving public understanding is also hindered by gaps in data and accountability. Limited CALD-disaggregated labour data (FECCA, 2020)—including language, ancestry, visa pathway and disability status—obscures patterns of underutilisation and exploitation, while the absence of mandatory equity indicators and public reporting weakens transparency across workforce and skills-recognition systems. The absence of disability-disaggregated data within migration and workforce statistics renders skilled migrants with disability invisible, preventing evidence-based policy responses to their specific barriers. Strengthening data collection and reporting is therefore central to informed public debate and trust.

Effective public awareness should explain:

- *why* skilled migrants are needed (specific shortages),
- *where* they are settling and working,
- *how* workers are protected from exploitation,
- *what* complementary investments are being made in housing, infrastructure and settlement, and
- *how* outcomes differ across intersecting identities, including for skilled migrants with disability.

Evidence from the care economy shows that public confidence in service systems—and in skilled migration more broadly—is strengthened when information is clear, accessible and culturally responsive (AMHC, 2025). Multicultural communities continue to encounter language barriers, inconsistent interpreter support and limited health literacy provisions, which contribute to inefficient service use and poorer outcomes. Improving public understanding of skilled migration therefore requires deliberate investment in multilingual communication, culturally adapted messaging and the use of disaggregated data to clearly demonstrate where and how skilled migrants contribute. Transparent reporting on skilled migrant outcomes, particularly in high-need sectors such as aged care and health, is essential to support a more informed public dialogue grounded in evidence rather than perception.

Key implication: Sustaining public confidence in skilled migration requires **transparent, accessible and locally relevant information**. Without clear reporting on outcomes, protections and system impacts—supported by robust, CALD-disaggregated data—public debate risks being shaped by perception rather than evidence, weakening social licence for the migration program.

Recommendations

9. **Adopt a transparent, outcomes-focused public communication approach.**
Public communication should clearly explain why skilled migrants are needed, where they are working, how workers are protected, and how migration is coordinated with housing, infrastructure and settlement investment and how outcomes vary across intersecting identities, including disability.
10. **Publish local and sector-specific and equity-disaggregated outcomes to build social licence.**
Regular reporting on skills shortages filled, regional outcomes, service delivery improvements and compliance activity safeguarding effectiveness, and outcomes disaggregated by disability status, gender, country of origin and visa pathway would strengthen public understanding and trust in skilled migration settings.

(f) International approaches and lessons

Comparable countries with similar migration objectives increasingly focus on:

- transparent occupation targeting,
- statutory timelines for skills recognition,
- financial support to reduce recognition costs,
- and coordinated settlement and labour-market integration strategies.

Examples include Germany's Recognition Act, Canada's fairness commissioners and loan schemes, and Sweden's occupation-specific fast-track programs. These approaches demonstrate that skilled migration outcomes improve when recognition, employment and settlement are treated as a single system.

International experience is particularly relevant for care-sector workforce planning. In Australia, aged-care and disability services rely heavily on migrant labour, yet bilingual and bicultural skills are rarely recognised or remunerated, contributing to low pay, insecure visas, high turnover and exploitation risk. Comparable jurisdictions have begun professionalising migrant care work through clearer pathways, recognition frameworks and faster integration, offering useful lessons for strengthening service quality and workforce sustainability.

- **Germany:** Recent reforms under the Skilled Immigration Act facilitate entry and recognition of foreign qualifications for skilled workers from third countries, and Germany's Federal Recognition Act guarantees a standardised process for foreign credential assessment (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2025).
- **Canada:** Canada's Foreign Credential Recognition Program evaluation (Government of Canada, 2025) shows how federal loans and support services can improve recognition outcomes and labour market integration for internationally trained professionals.
- **Sweden:** OECD analysis and Sweden's Fast Track Initiative illustrate approaches to integrating skilled migrants rapidly into shortage occupations through coordinated recognition, training and support (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2025).

Key implication: International experience shows that skilled migration outcomes improve when recognition, employment pathways and settlement supports are designed as a single, coordinated system—offering practical and transferable lessons for Australian reform.

Recommendations

11. Adopt international best practice in skills recognition and fairness.

Australia should draw on comparable models—such as Germany's statutory recognition timelines, Canada's fairness oversight and loan schemes, and Sweden's occupation-specific fast-track programs—to reduce delays and barriers in skills recognition, while ensuring processes accommodate reasonable adjustments for professionals with disability.

12. Treat migration, employment and settlement as a single integrated system.

International experience shows that skilled migration outcomes improve when recognition, employment pathways and settlement supports are designed and delivered as a coordinated system rather than separate policy silos.

(g) Skilled Migrants with Disability:

Australia is a State Party to the CRPD, which obliges governments to ensure that people with disability enjoy equal access to employment (Article 27), including through accessible employment services, reasonable accommodations, and protection from discrimination (United Nations, 2006). These obligations apply to all people with disability within Australia's jurisdiction, regardless of

migration status (Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, General Comment No. 8, 2022).

Despite these commitments, skilled migrants with disability remain largely invisible within migration, workforce and skills policy settings. Disability is not systematically captured in migration or labour-market data, and current systems fail to account for the intersection of disability, visa status, skills recognition and employment access. As a result, skilled migrants with disability face compounded barriers, including inaccessible recognition processes, discriminatory recruitment practices, limited workplace adjustments and heightened vulnerability linked to visa insecurity. These gaps exclude capable professionals from full participation—particularly in sectors facing acute shortages—and undermine productivity, workforce sustainability and trust in the migration system.

Key implication: Skilled migration systems that fail to recognise and accommodate disability systematically exclude talent, suppress workforce participation and undermine Australia’s commitments under the CRPD. Conversely, inclusive systems improve employment outcomes, productivity and trust in public institutions.

Recommendations

13. **Recognise and address the compounded barriers facing skilled migrants with disability.** Skills recognition, visa processing, settlement services and employment support systems must be accessible and accommodate reasonable adjustments as required under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and the CRPD. Migration and workforce data should be disaggregated by disability status alongside other identity markers to reveal patterns of exclusion and inform targeted reforms.
14. **Ensure accessibility, reasonable adjustment and protection from discrimination across systems.** Skills recognition, visa processing, settlement services and employment support systems must be accessible and accommodate reasonable adjustments, in line with the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and Australia’s obligations under the CRPD.
15. **Improve disability-disaggregated data across migration and labour-market systems.** Migration and workforce data should be systematically disaggregated by disability status, alongside visa category, gender and ethnicity, to reveal patterns of exclusion, inform targeted reform and support accountability.

4. Conclusion

Skilled migration remains essential to Australia’s economic prosperity, service delivery, social cohesion and long-term nation-building. In the context of population ageing and persistent skills shortages, skilled migrants make a substantial contribution to productivity, innovation and fiscal sustainability. However, the evidence presented throughout this submission shows that Australia is **not realising the full value of its skilled migration program**, due to systemic barriers that prevent many migrants from contributing at their full capability.

The scale of underutilisation—affecting hundreds of thousands of skilled migrants, with disproportionate impacts on migrant women and migrants from the Global South, migrants with disability—represents a significant loss of human capital and public value. These outcomes are not

the result of individual shortcomings, but of **weak mechanisms for systems thinking, fragmented governance, costly and opaque skills-recognition systems, visa precarity, workplace discrimination, and insufficient coordination across migration, workforce, housing and settlement policy**. Left unaddressed, these failures risk entrenching skills shortages, inflating costs, constraining service delivery, and undermining public confidence in the migration system.

These failures do not only result in skills underutilisation, but also expose some migrants—particularly those on temporary or employer-dependent visas—to **serious forms of labour exploitation, including modern slavery**. Visa precarity, restricted job mobility, geographic isolation and fear of adverse migration consequences can deter reporting and weaken safeguards, allowing exploitation to persist alongside skills shortages. Addressing the full value of skilled migration therefore requires stronger, accessible protection and reporting mechanisms as an integral component of migration, workforce and integrity settings.

The experience of multicultural workers in the care economy offers a compelling case study of what is at stake when fragmentation, underutilisation and cultural exclusion remain unaddressed. **Skilled migrants are central to the functioning of essential services**, yet inefficiencies in recognition, regulation and workforce design prevent their full participation and suppress productivity. Incorporating lessons from the care sector into skilled migration reform highlights the broader need for integrated systems that treat cultural responsiveness, streamlined regulation and secure work as core components of national productivity and social cohesion.

FECCA argues that skilled migration cannot be assessed solely through visa numbers or processing efficiency. Its success must be measured by **how effectively skills are recognised, mobilised, retained and translated into employment, services and community outcomes for all migrants, including those with disability and those facing multiple disadvantages**. Achieving this requires a shift from siloed policy settings to a genuinely integrated system—linking labour-market needs, skills recognition and licensing, settlement and employment support, housing and infrastructure planning, worker protections, and accurate data that are driven by inputs from business and community sectors.

International experience reinforces this conclusion. Comparable countries such as Germany, Canada and Sweden demonstrate that when recognition, employment pathways and settlement supports are treated as a single system—supported by statutory timelines, financial assistance, transparent governance and sector-specific fast-track programs—skilled migration outcomes improve for migrants, employers and communities alike. These approaches offer practical and transferable lessons for Australia, particularly in critical sectors such as health, aged care, disability services, education, construction and regional service delivery.

Within this reform agenda, **JSA** has a pivotal role to play in closing the gap between skills and jobs. To do so effectively and equitably, **JSA's** functions, data practices and governance arrangements must be informed by the Multicultural Policy Framework, and embed **multicultural inclusion, disability inclusion, and skills recognition as core, measurable responsibilities**, supported by disaggregated workforce data, transparent skills-recognition pathways, and structured engagement with affected communities.

Multicultural peak bodies and community organisations—such as **FECCA and its members, alongside NEDA**—are essential partners in translating these reforms into practice. As the national peak body representing culturally and linguistically diverse communities, FECCA brings community-grounded evidence, policy expertise and established relationships with migrants, employers, unions, professional bodies and service providers.

Through structured partnership with government, JSA and the Office for Multicultural Affairs, FECCA is well-placed to support the co-design of inclusive workforce and skills settings, convene stakeholders to inform evidence-based targeting and policy iteration, pilot and evaluate place-based employment pathways (including skills-recognition navigation and industry-specific supports), strengthen CALD workforce data and equity indicators, and provide ongoing intelligence on exploitation and discrimination risks to inform continuous system improvement.

In conclusion, unlocking the full value of skilled migration is both an **economic imperative and a social responsibility and a human rights obligation under the CRPD**. With coordinated, system-wide reform—and with strong partnerships between government, JSA and multicultural peak bodies—Australia can reduce underutilisation, strengthen productivity, improve essential services, support regional development, and sustain public trust in its migration program. Skilled migration, when designed and delivered as an integrated system, remains one of Australia’s greatest assets and a cornerstone of an inclusive, prosperous and resilient future.

References

- Activate Australia's Skills (2024). Open letter to the Australian Parliament. Retrieved from <https://activateaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Activate-Australias-skills-Open-letter-041024.pdf>
- Activate Australia's Skills (2025). The Productivity Fast Track: Accelerating growth through better skills recognition. Retrieved from https://activateaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/The-productivity-Fast-Track_digital.pdf
- AIHW (2021), How do overseas-born Australians use aged care services? Retrieved from <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/aged-care/overseas-born-australians-using-aged-care-services/summary>
- AIHW (2023), Health workforce. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/workforce/health-workforce>
- AMWA (2025a). Economic Reform Roundtable Submission. Retrieved from [Economic Reform Roundtable Submission | Australian Multicultural Women's Alliance](#)
- AMWA (2025b). Job Skills Australia – Gender Economic Equality Study consultation submission. Retrieved from [JSA-Gender-Economic-Equality-Study-Consultation-Submission.pdf](#)
- AMWA & NWEA (2025). Building a Skilled and Adaptable Workforce – Joint Submission. Retrieved from <https://amwa.net.au/policies/building-a-skilled-and-adaptable-workforce-amwa-and-nwea/>
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022). Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings methodology. Retrieved from <https://www.abs.gov.au/methodologies/disability-ageing-and-carers-australia-summary-findings-methodology/2022>
- Australian Human Rights Commission. (2016). Willing to work: National inquiry into employment discrimination against older Australians and Australians with disability. Retrieved from https://humanrights.gov.au/_data/assets/file/0024/45357/WTW_2016_Resource_WEB-FINAL.pdf
- Australian Multicultural Health Collaborative. (2025). Submission to the Productivity Commission's interim report: Delivering quality care more efficiently.
- CEDA (2022). Jobs & Skills Summit: Unlocking skilled migration. Retrieved from <https://cedakenticomedia.blob.core.windows.net/cedamediatest/kentico/media/attachments/jobs-paper-template-final1.pdf>
- Cedefop & ReferNet (2025). Timeline of VET policies in Europe. Retrieved from <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/timeline-vet-policies-europe>

Charlesworth, S. & Howe, J. (2018), Migrant Workers in Frontline Care, UNSW.

Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2022). CRPD/C/GC/8: General comment No. 8 (2022) on the right of persons with disabilities to work and employment. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/crpdgc8-general-comment-no-8-2022-right-persons>

Deloitte Access Economics (2024). Billion Dollar Benefit: The economic impact of unlocking the skills potential of migrants in Australia. Retrieved from https://www.ssi.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/DAE_SSI_Skills_Mismatch_Report_19062024_WEB.pdf

Department of Home Affairs (2023). Migration Strategy: Getting migration working for the nation. Retrieved from https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/programs-subsite/migration-strategy/Documents/migration-strategy.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Department of Home Affairs (2024). Towards Fairness: A Multicultural Australia. Retrieved from <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/multicultural-framework-review/Documents/report-summary/multicultural-framework-review-report-english.pdf>

FECCA (2020). If we don't count it... it doesn't count! Retrieved from <https://fecca.org.au/updates/if-we-dont-count-it-it-doesnt-count-2/>

FECCA (2022). A Secure and Successful Multicultural Workforce. FECCA's Jobs and Skills Summit Issues Paper- August 2022. Retrieved from <https://fecca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/FECCA-Jobs-and-Skills-Issues-Paper-August-2022.pdf>

FECCA (2024). Multicultural Framework Review Pre-Budget Submission. Retrieved from <https://fecca.org.au/updates/multicultural-framework-review/>

Government of Canada (2025). Evaluation of the Foreign Credential Recognition Program, 2025. Retrieved from https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/corporate/reports/evaluations/foreign-credential-recognition.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Grattan Institute (2023). Short-changed: How to stop the exploitation of migrant workers in Australia. Retrieved from <https://grattan.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Short-changed-How-to-stop-the-exploitation-of-migrant-workers-in-Australia.pdf>

Houlbrook-Walk, M. & Smith, E.J. (2026). Australia's anti-slavery commissioner asks Tony Burke for visa reform after inquest into Jerwin Royupa's death. ABC, 22 January. Retrieved from <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2026-01-22/jerwin-royupa-inquest-training-visa-program-risk-exploitation/106256652>

SBS (2026, 16 January). Coroner refers exploited migrant worker's death to federal police. Retrieved from <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/exploited-worker-jerwin-royupas-death-sparks-anti-slavery-calls/jpnu1zrrd>

Settlement Services International (2024). Skilled & ready: A blueprint for activating Australia's overseas-trained workforce. Retrieved from <https://activateaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Activate-Australia-Skills-Blueprint-for-Reform-Oct-2024-WEB-1.pdf>

Unions NSW (2024). Disrespected, disregarded, and discarded: Workplace exploitation, sexual harassment and the experience of migrant women living in Australia on temporary visas. Retrieved from <https://www.unionsnsw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/REPORT-NICSHR.pdf>

United Nations (2006). Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf>