



International Student Principles



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Principles for promoting and protecting the human rights of international students

The Australian Human Rights Commission originally developed the *Principles for promoting and protecting the human rights of international students* in 2009. The principles were developed in consultation with international students and peak bodies in the international education sector.

In 2021 these principles were updated and enhanced in light of the evolving needs of international students and, in particular, the impact of COVID-19 on their human rights. The update recognises that Australia's learning institutions and those engaging with international students should strive towards culturally competent systems and culture, services, policies and practices that affirm, protect and promote the rights of international students. This update was done in consultation with peak international student and education sector organisations.



Principle 1:

Enhancing the human rights of international students, including by eliminating barriers to adequate health services, affordable and safe housing, and fair, just and meaningful employment



To implement this Principle, it is important that stakeholders:

- 1.1** ensure that international students and their families have access to affordable medical and hospital treatment while studying in Australia
- 1.2** ensure international students and their families have sufficient information about how to access emergency health services when required, and that health services are aware of their obligations to provide services
- 1.3** support access to gender-specific health education and services and appropriate obstetrics care for international students and their partners
- 1.4** support access to mental health and wellbeing services for international students
- 1.5** pursue affordable and safe accommodation options for international students
- 1.6** ensure the development of an appropriate set of national or nationally consistent minimum standards to enhance accountability and safety for homestay and share house arrangements for international students aged 18 years and over
- 1.7** enhance the safety, security and social inclusion of international students through affordable public transport
- 1.8** ensure international students have accurate information about their employment rights, particularly in relation to remuneration, employment conditions and occupational health and safety, and relevant support services
- 1.9** ensure that employers are aware of their obligations to safeguard international students from exploitative employment
- 1.10** adopt, where there are significant crises occurring in the country of origin, a proactive, timely and flexible whole-of-government response that addresses the associated financial, safety and well-being of students from that country, and communicate this response efficiently to students, including through the *Study in Australia* website (www.studyinaustralia.gov.au)

Principle 2:

Ensuring all international students have access to human rights and freedom from discrimination protections

To ensure that international students are properly equipped to address any violence or unlawful discrimination they may experience, it is vital that they can access the necessary social, legal and information services. Greater awareness of their rights, responsibilities and the complaint handling processes available to them will mean they are better able to address issues they encounter or seek redress for unlawful treatment. This requires the relevant organisations to develop and distribute information that is accurate, accessible and appropriate for international students.

There are a range of organisations that provide these services, including independent health services, commissions, bodies handling complaints about housing, law enforcement agencies, privacy commissions, ombudsmen and anti-discrimination commissions.



To implement this Principle, it is important that stakeholders:

- 2.1 provide adequate information to international students about how to make complaints about potential and actual breaches of their rights, including in relation to experiences of racism
- 2.2 ensure that adequate information on tenancy rights and responsibilities and complaints processes are available to international students pre- and post-arrival, to maximise safety and avoid exploitation and unsafe co-habitation
- 2.3 provide international students with clear information about how to make complaints about potential or actual breaches of their employment rights
- 2.4 provide international students with access to targeted legal advice and support
- 2.5 highlight and address barriers that may hinder or disincentivise international students from accessing their human rights

Principle 3:

Understanding the diverse needs of international students

A clear understanding among stakeholders of the needs and experiences of international students living in Australia is vital to ensuring the protection of their human rights. Achieving this greater level of understanding requires better and more comprehensive research and data collection. Research and data collection that would contribute to a better understanding of the international student experience would particularly benefit from looking at the safety, discrimination, well-being and living arrangements of international students. It is also important that the results of this research and data collection is available to all stakeholders, so that policy and service development can respond to the diverse and changing needs of international students.



To implement this Principle, it is important that stakeholders:

- 3.1** initiate research and data collection that results in a better understanding of the international student experience, in accordance with privacy laws and concerns
- 3.2** collect and report on data relating to the experience of racism and racially motivated crime directed at international students, and ensure that this data informs policy and service delivery
- 3.3** report publicly on the numbers and causes of international student deaths and how this information is being utilised to ensure the safety and well-being of international students
- 3.5** collect and report on data relating to exploitative practices in education, employment and accommodation, and ensure that this data informs policy and service delivery



Principle 4:

Empowering international students to participate in and contribute to community life during their stay in Australia



To implement this Principle, it is important that stakeholders:

- 4.1 facilitate ongoing opportunities for international students, their representative bodies and stakeholders working with international students to come together, at the institutional and government levels, to identify opportunities to improve outcomes
- 4.2 for international students
- 4.3 improve the accessibility of information resources and services by providing information on an ongoing basis, in plain English and in relevant languages, either through translations or the appropriate use of interpreters, and in innovative ways, including through the use of social media
- 4.4 increase awareness of key information resources and services by promoting them on the Study in Australia website, via education providers, and other appropriate means
- 4.5 encourage ongoing opportunities for international students to learn about local and relevant issues, such as the role of local law enforcement agencies, safety awareness training, sexual awareness and physical and mental well-being
- 4.6 take steps to increase their cultural competency and proficiency by assessing practises, reviewing policies and consulting with international students
- 4.6 create ongoing opportunities for international students to interact with local students and members of the broader community during their time in Australia, in consultation with international students and their representative bodies



Principle 5:

Celebrating the cultural and religious diversity of international students

To celebrate the cultural and religious diversity of international students, stakeholders are encouraged to cultivate an inclusive environment which is supportive of international students. Encouraging international students to enjoy their cultural heritage, profess and practise their religion and use their own language and to participate in the community will foster greater cross-cultural understanding.



To implement this Principle, it is important that stakeholders:

- 5.1** provide an environment and culture that supports and encourages international students to celebrate their racial and cultural heritage, practise their religions and traditions, and use their languages in the context of Australia's laws, values, aspirations and responsibilities
- 5.2** support contributions and inclusive participation of international students from all backgrounds
- 5.3** promote cultural/religious activities which celebrate the diversity of international students and are designed to share cultural/religious knowledge, understanding and experiences
- 5.4** promote the positive contribution international students make to the social and economic fabric of the communities in which they participate



Further information

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