

# Refugee Legal: Defending the Rights of Refugees



## Who We Are



Refugee Legal is an independent, non-profit community legal centre, specialising in refugee and immigration law, policy, and procedure. We have been at the forefront of providing legal assistance for over 35 years.

We are Australia's largest provider of free legal assistance to asylum seekers, refugees, and vulnerable migrants.

As lawyers, expert in immigration law, we work directly and strategically to defend the rights of asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants.

## What We Do

We focus on the greatest need: legal permission to secure to secure stay, protection and freedom in Australia and to reunite with family here.

Our work has delivered many remarkable wins for clients and changes to policy and practice which have changed the course of their lives for the better.

We advise and assist through our telephone and evening advice services and ongoing representation to those whose cases have merit but who are unable to access services elsewhere.

We advocate for law reform to ensure that Australia's migration

and refugee programs operate in a just, fair, ethical, and humane manner.

We educate and inform through the delivery of national training programs, accredited continuing professional development seminars for registered migration agents, as well as community information sessions.

In all areas of our work, partnerships and collaboration are central. We could not do what we do without the support of a vast, nation-wide network of volunteers, pro bono corporate law firms, NGO sector agencies, leading law schools, UNHCR and other international bodies and the wider community.

At the heart of our work, lie personal lives and unique stories. So many people have been granted protection, found safety from family violence, been freed from detention, reunited with family, or had their residency restored.

Staff, volunteers, and pro bono partners continue to do what they do they do best: providing legal help – and hope. Together we will continue to make the biggest possible impact, knowing the powerful potential of our work to change the course of many people's lives for the better.

### Acknowledgment of Country

Refugee Legal acknowledges the traditional custodians of the lands across Australia and, in particular, the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Bunurong Boon Wurrung peoples of the Eastern Kulin Nation, traditional custodians of the land on which our office is situated. We pay deep respect to elders both past and present.

## From our President and Executive Director

"Throughout the year our continuing ability to adapt and adjust and to do things differently resulted in expanding access to our services for the most vulnerable.

At year's end, with changing landscapes on many fronts, including political, policy, COVID and international, we are strongly placed to respond to future challenges of escalating demand for our essential legal services.

As we enter a period of reform in immigration policy in Australia, we are strongly positioned to advocate for change underpinned by policies which are fair, just, equitable and humane.

Together we will continue to make the greatest possible impact driven by our belief in the powerful capacity for our work to change the course of many people's lives immeasurably for the better and to shape systemic change."

## From our President and Executive Director

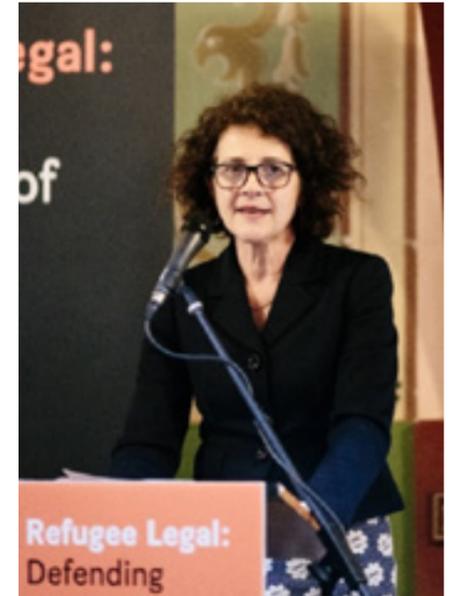


In the face of the ongoing COVID-19 upheaval, ensuring the continuity of our services and the safety, health and well-being of people seeking our help and of staff, volunteers and other members of the community again underpinned all that we did.

Through our work, many people were granted protection, freed from detention, evacuated to safety, better protected from family violence, or had their residency restored.

Over the past three years, the COVID 19 crisis has put so many asylum seekers, refugees, and vulnerable migrants at even greater risk, compounding their vulnerabilities.

There are none more vulnerable and in need of help and protection than those who are detained, often indefinitely. Detention further harms people who have fled from harm, often severely.



Detention policy continues to be punitive, arbitrary, unnecessary, and harmful. Indefinite detention epitomises the appalling inhumanity and extremity of immigration policy in this country. It remains one of the great injustices of our times.

Refugee Legal continued to respond at the frontline to again secure the release of people from prolonged detention. Through sustained and powerful legal and advocacy work by many, the men imprisoned indefinitely in the Park Hotel were finally freed.

In partnership with others, we will continue to challenge the detention of individuals to wrest back their freedom.

We responded to the direct impact of global crises in a variety of ways, through focused legal assistance and targeted strategies for people impacted by the crises in Afghanistan as well as in Myanmar and Ukraine.

## From our President and Executive Director

This included a large-scale program to help to Afghans evacuated to Australia to apply for permanent residence and a special clinic program to help Afghans with family reunion applications. While we assisted with the evacuation of people at imminent risk, we pleaded the case for those left behind who remained in grave danger including teachers, aid workers, female judges, human rights defenders, journalists, artists, the women's soccer team and medicos. We worked closely with Afghan-Australian community members on priority needs and advocacy and worked in partnership to lift the Afghan intake.

Following last year's brutal military coup in Myanmar, our special Myanmar Legal Clinic delivered legal help that led to grants of protection. We provided legal help to many Ukrainians fleeing the war and ran an all-day legal information and policy strategy roundtable at the Melbourne airport with Ukrainian-Australian community leaders flown in from around the country.

For staff and volunteers, it's often said that 'it's one thing to be watching this tragedy unfold on the nightly news. It's another thing altogether, as a lawyer, to actually be able to do something about it now. Something that can change the course of someone's life for the better.'

Throughout the year, our ability to adapt and adjust and to do things differently, resulted in expanding

access to our services for the most vulnerable.

We continued to promote and protect people's legal rights, educate across the community, raise awareness of injustices, develop proposals for reform, and take action for change. We built and strengthened partnerships to advocate at local and global levels for fair, just, and humane policies, whether online or in person.

All our critical core services, telephone advice, night service, our special legal clinics, full casework representation and strategic litigation continued to be provided daily by our legal team working in hybrid arrangements, online and onsite, together with an ever-growing number of volunteers from across the country.

During the year, we also developed a Strategic Plan for 2023-25 to guide us for the next three years.

Delivering our services and rising to these challenges was only possible with the partnerships and collaboration of a vast and expanding network of over 600 volunteers, now more than 20 pro bono corporate law firms, the Victorian Government, Victoria Legal Aid, leading law schools, UNHCR and other international agencies, and our very generous philanthropic funders, major donors and many community donations, and sector partners.

In these turbulent times, our partners have stood shoulder to

shoulder with us with us, helping to power our work promoting and protecting the rights and lives of people seeking asylum, refugees, and vulnerable migrants.

At year's end, with changing landscapes on many fronts including political, policy, COVID and international, Refugee Legal is strongly placed to respond to future challenges of escalating demand for our essential legal services.

As we enter a period of reform in immigration policy in Australia, we are strongly positioned to advocate for change underpinned by policies which are fair, just, equitable and humane.

Together we will continue to make the greatest possible impact driven by our belief in the powerful capacity for our work to change the course of many people's lives immeasurably for the better and to shape systemic change.

Finally, thank you to our staff and volunteers, the backbone of Refugee Legal, for their commitment, dedication, and skill and to Committee members for their work, their continued dedication to the defence of the rights of refugees and disadvantaged migrants' rights, and to the sustainability of Refugee Legal.

**David Manne**  
Executive Director

**Clare Morton**  
President

## RASSA merges with Refugee Legal

The Refugee Advocacy Service of South Australia (RASSA), the State's only specialist community legal centre providing legal advice and assistance to people seeking asylum and refugees merged with Refugee Legal on July 1, 2022. RASSA will now be known as Refugee Legal.

The merger followed extensive consultation and due diligence by both organisations.

Both organisations entered the merger with a shared focus and intention to combine their expertise, energy, and resources to deliver a more sustainable and effective service.

The merger will ensure that South Australia not only maintains but can further develop services to deliver the essential assistance needed to meet the demand for legal help from many vulnerable people in the SA community.

The merger secures for SA a sustainable, responsive client service that delivers a broad and diverse range of casework and advice and builds on past effort and commitment. It provides new opportunities for deeper and broader engagement with South Australia's legal community, which has demonstrated a continuing passion and commitment to assisting with asylum seeker

and refugee issues and enables a stronger connection and collaboration for SA with national legal and advocacy networks on asylum seeker and refugee issues.

The merger also fulfils RASSA's intention to reinvigorate its reach and engagement with members and stakeholders alike.

## We Advise and Assist

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"Providing advice and assistance to women and their children experiencing family violence who are in vulnerable migration situations has continued to be a significant part of our legal, policy and advocacy work. Our assistance means women can effectively put their cases for protection, or in relation to partner visas, giving them the best chance to rebuild their lives in safety."

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### Advise & Assist

We **advise** and **assist** refugees, people seeking asylum and vulnerable migrants through a combination of direct legal assistance to many and strategic legal action for systemic change. We seek to defend people's rights, to secure protections, redress injustices and promote legal and policy change.

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### Educate

We **educate** to improve ethics, competence, and professional standards, to raise awareness within the community, develop understanding, inspire ideas and collaborations, and build action for change.

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### Advocate

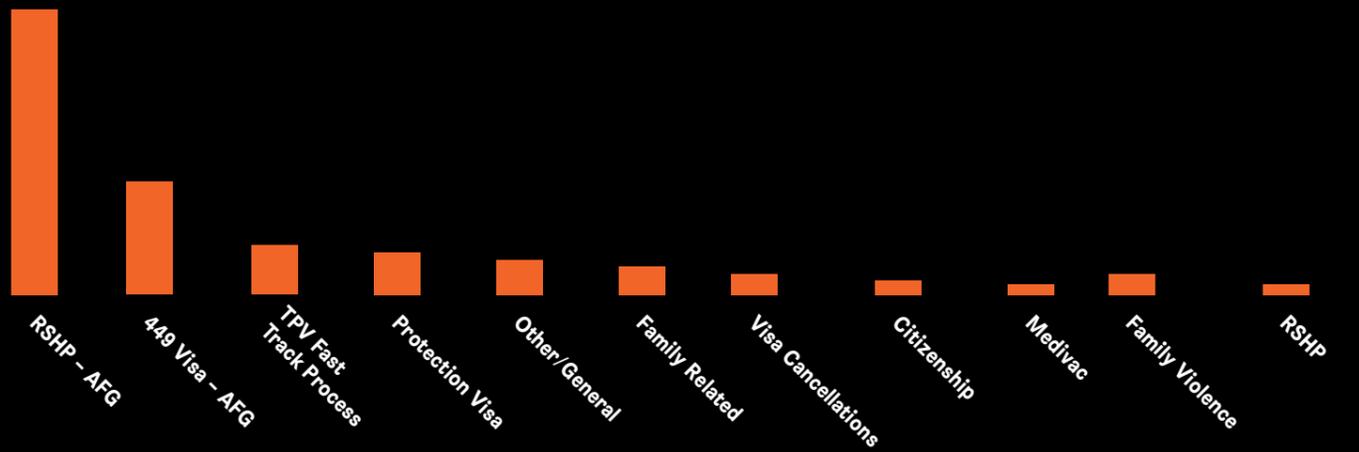
We **advocate** at local, national, and international levels through the media, in public and private forums and together with key partners, combat systemic injustices which threaten rights and lives and promote immigration and refugee policies that are fair, just, equitable and humane.

## The Numbers for 2021/2022

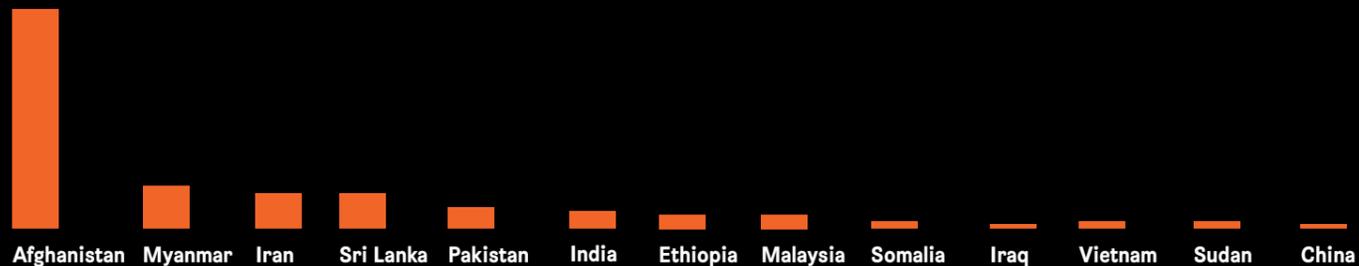
Behind every statistic is a person, a family, in need of advice and assistance to navigate a complex system, and an opportunity to help change their lives for the better.

Total Client Assistance	14,146
Telephone Advice	5,971
Face-to-face Advice	1,857
People Represented	2,376
Legal Clinic Assistance.	3,942

### No. of Matters



### No. of Clients



## We Advise and Assist



Through an ongoing mix of lockdowns, hybrid return to work arrangements, lengthy processing delays, and a change of government, we continued to deliver expert legal advice in response to an everincreasing need.

Our primary work remained assisting those who fear for their safety in their home countries to apply for protection in Australia at the initial visa application stage and through merit appeals processes, whether they be Ethiopians impacted by political upheaval, Afghans seeking further assessment of their claims after the Taliban takeover, students from Myanmar unable to return home following the coup, Ukrainians displaced by the war or people from all over the globe fleeing political, religious, gender and sexuality based violence and persecution.

Women and children impacted by family violence, as well as

permanent residents and citizens separated from their partners, children and other loved ones remained a fundamental focus.

Advice and assistance were provided through our core services twice-weekly telephone advice, our evening advice service, and our day service for those impacted by family violence and ongoing casework.

Clinic-based approaches were developed to respond quickly where there were high levels of demand. Our Myanmar clinic helped lodge protection visa applications and our character clinic assisted those facing visa cancellation or refusal on character grounds.

Our work protecting the legal rights of clients facing long-term detention resulted in the release of people facing indefinite detention. While much work

remains to be done through casework and advocacy there is positive change with more clients being freed from prolonged detention.

We provided advice and assistance to many transferred back to Australia from offshore detention who face ongoing uncertainty about their future.

For now, delays in processing at primary and merits review stage continue to create uncertainty and carry a heavy practical and psychological toll on many of our clients.

However, the prospect of reform and with this improved communication with the Government and the Department of Home Affairs provides hope that a fair and more efficient processing will be achieved for our clients.

## Supporting women and children experiencing family violence

Providing advice and assistance to women and their children experiencing family violence who are in vulnerable migration situations continued to be a significant part of our legal, policy and advocacy work.

We assisted women to put their cases for protection, or in relation to partner visas, to give them the best chance to rebuild their lives in safety. Vulnerable women received independent advice, and in many cases access to their own visa pathway so they no longer had to remain dependent on a violent partner's visa.

While most clients impacted by family violence are women and children, they are not the only ones who experience harm. We continued to provide specialised legal services to people from the LGBTIQ+ community, who are often amongst the most marginalized in our community.

Our Family Violence work is headed by a team of female lawyers, with many years of experience in immigration law, family violence and working with vulnerable clients. Demand for assistance continued to grow and clients seeking our assistance have multiple and complex vulnerabilities.

We provided a range of assistance to women including one-off advice and prioritised providing full application



assistance to clients. The continuity of service we provide to women enables clients to feel comfortable and supported and means they don't have to unnecessarily retell experiences of abuse and trauma.

Our day service continued with weekly appointments supervised by our family violence legal team and conducted by lawyers from our pro-bono partners. Our lawyers worked collaboratively with other specialist services to ensure that clients received the advice and assistance required.

We continued to take an active role in policy and advocacy. We engaged directly with

Department of Home Affairs on issues impacting this vulnerable group and as a member of the Executive of the National Advocacy Group on Women on Temporary Visas worked with our colleagues across a variety of legal and non-legal services to advocate for a new visa for women experiencing family violence.

## Responding to the Crisis in Afghanistan

In August 2021 the world watched in horror as the Taliban captured Kabul. The fear and the chaos reverberated with the Afghan community in Australia who desperately wanted to assist loved ones escape to safety.

Refugee Legal responded rapidly to the crisis with the development of three programs to address the urgent need: Evacuations, Family Reunion Clinic and the 449 Program.

### Evacuations

We worked closely with international agencies to prepare and lodge Refugee and Humanitarian visa applications for individuals at increased risk of persecution by the Taliban including aid workers and high-profile professional women. Together with the help of our pro bono partners we successfully lodged large numbers of applications to evacuate individuals to safety.

### Family Reunion Clinic

We ramped up our assistance to members of the Australian Afghan community to make Refugee and Humanitarian visa applications for their family members in Afghanistan with the assistance of a large group of dedicated pro bono lawyers and paralegals working under the supervision of Refugee Legal lawyers.

We lodged large numbers of applications for immediate family members under the 'split family



provisions' enabling individuals to be reunited with their spouses, young children and critically, for unaccompanied minors to be reunited with their parents. The distress of these clients is often palpable, and our specialised team worked to support clients through the process.

### 449 Visa Program

Since the Taliban takeover more than 2000 Afghans have been evacuated to Victoria on temporary subclass 449 Humanitarian Stay visas. The then Federal Government gave them just seven working days to validly lodge their visa applications.

Refugee Legal provided free large-scale legal assistance to as many of these applicants as possible and assembled a dedicated team of lawyers, administrators, a project manager, and paralegal volunteers to manage the huge volume of urgent work. We worked with support services for

these clients, many of whom are highly vulnerable having recently experienced trauma in Afghanistan.

We assisted many unaccompanied minors and worked to support them in collaboration with their guardians, teachers, and health professionals.

The program has been hugely successful with high numbers of clients subsequently granted permanent residence in Australia and the ability to rebuild their lives in safety and security.

## Legal Clinic Program

"Whilst we wait for these reforms to be implemented our staff and pro bono volunteers work together with a renewed sense of purpose to assist refugees and asylum seekers daily, helping to navigate a complex and unfair system."

## On a Faster Track



Our Fast Track Clinic has been operating since 2017 when the then Federal Government forced around 31,000 asylum seekers who had arrived in Australia by boat to apply for protection before an arbitrary deadline of 1 October.

Under this 'lodge or leave' policy, people were told to lodge a Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) application by this deadline, or face deportation without the Government ever hearing their case. Many of these people had been waiting to have their cases heard since 2012.

Refugee Legal, together with the help of our pro bono partners and volunteers, responded to this arbitrary deadline by assisting thousands of people to lodge applications for protection.

In the years since - including this year - the Fast Track Clinic Program has continued to provide large-scale legal assistance to clients needing help with their protection assessment interviews at the Department of Home Affairs, reviews at the Immigration Assessment Authority, and for those already found to be owed protection and granted TPVs, applications for further protection visas.

The Federal Government's rigid adherence to this Fast Track process meant that even where people had been found to be owed protection, their options for permanent residence in Australia were extremely limited, leaving them in an intractable position of uncertainty, without any ability to be reunited with their family in safety.

However, with the change in Federal Government, our clients are now able to look to the future with hope. The new Federal Government has committed to abolish temporary protection and offer permanent protection to refugees in Australia, which will end the cycle of uncertainty and suffering for over 19,000 people. This change will allow families to be reunited and finally provide our clients with an opportunity to rebuild their lives with dignity and hope and a sense of belonging.

While we wait for these reforms to be implemented, our staff and pro bono volunteers work together with a renewed sense of purpose to assist refugees and asylum seekers daily, helping to navigate a complex and unfair system.

## Stories of Courage and Hope

"These stories are stark reminders that our legal work and our ability to stay the course so often makes a fundamental difference to the lives and the liberty of people in the face of injustice. These and so many other similar stories are also searing reminders of the urgent need for fundamental policy change after an era of inhumanity."

### Tears of joy after 11 year legal battle

Zenebech arrived in Australia on a visitor visa 11 years ago. She applied for protection shortly afterwards in fear her life at the hands of the authorities due her Christianity, Amhara ethnicity, and her support for a banned opposition political group, in both Ethiopia, and later, in Australia.

Her 10-year-old daughter remained in her mother's care in Ethiopia due to her fears of return. Zenebech's protection case was refused and between 2013 and 2015, four separate formal pleas for Ministerial intervention were dismissed.

Despite hospitalisation due severe mental health issues, the Department pressured her to depart on threat of detention and deportation. In mid-2015 amidst a groundswell of community support, Zenebech's plight made it to the front page of The Age.

After sustained legal and public pressure, the Minister later that year allowed her to re-apply for protection, but the Department refused her case again, holding the public advocacy against her, accusing her of a contrivance to bolster her case.

We appealed her case and just recently her claims were accepted and her case for protection approved. She cried with joy on hearing the news knowing that 11 years later she can now sponsor her daughter to join her in starting a new and secure life in Australia.

### Finally freed after four years

Hashim, an Afghan Hazara was resettled in Australia with his sister in 2008. He was 15. Hashim was orphaned when he was six, subjected years of physical and psychological abuse and forced into child labour.

In 2018 his Australian residency was cancelled, just after the birth of his and his wife's first child, a daughter, Farida. He was first detained at the Melbourne Immigration Transit Accommodation (MITA), then sent to detention at Yongah Hill in WA, and then to Christmas Island where he remained incarcerated for most of the next four years, thousands of kilometres away from his home, his wife and daughter.

From as early as she could talk Farida would ask daily 'When is daddy coming home?' Hashim sought our help and realised that he could apply for a protection visa. We helped him to apply, but for over two years the Department sat on the case. Requests for relocation to Melbourne to be close to family were rejected. We appealed his case, challenging the cancellation of his visa. Earlier this year, after a four-year legal battle the cancellation was overturned, and his residency restored.

Within days he was on a plane back to Melbourne and with deep relief and overwhelming joy reunited with his wife and now four-year-old daughter.

### Ali and Anisa and their parents

In August 2021 at the height of the crisis in Afghanistan, Ali was desperately concerned about his sister, Anisa.

Ali was a former client and is now an Australian citizen. Anisa, a young mother, and a defender of women's rights had remained in Afghanistan but was now receiving direct threats from the Taliban. She was desperate to escape.

Ali contacted Refugee Legal and together we prepared an urgent application for Anisa and her family. They were granted subclass 449 visas (Temporary Humanitarian visas) and, after two dangerous attempts to depart, made it through Kabul airport and onto an Australian evacuation flight.

Once safely in Australia, we assisted Anisa and her family to apply for Permanent Humanitarian settlement in Australia. Permanent visas were granted.

Anisa and Ali's concerns then turned to their remaining family in Afghanistan, their elderly parents. We have assisted Anisa and Ali to prepare an application for Humanitarian visas. While we wait for the decision, their concerns for their parents remain.

## Our Volunteers

"Volunteering at Refugee Legal allows you to contribute in some small way to improving the lives of those around you, be they here in Australia or abroad. Regardless of the size of the task or it's individual importance, every opportunity you have to defend the rights of another person is both empowering and a deep privilege."

"Volunteering at Refugee Legal has been the most rewarding part of my law degree so far. I have been able to gain unmatched, hands-on experience with clients, completing tangible and important tasks for their visa applications, as well as honing my research skills to assist solicitors. Refugee legal gives volunteers the trust to work independently, learn, and grow as budding lawyers, whilst also knowing that a strong, friendly, and helpful team of staff are always happy to help."

## Our Volunteers



We could not achieve all that we do without our incredible team of volunteers, pro-bono and university partners who work with us every day and remind us of the strength of the goodwill that exists in the community for what we do.

Over the year our volunteer numbers grew to 600, pro-bono partnerships to more than 20, the intern program expanded to incorporate more opportunities across a wide range of our programs, and we strengthened our university relationships.

The strength and quality of our relationships with volunteers, pro bono partners and the systems that support them allowed Refugee Legal to expand service delivery rapidly to respond to refugee crises round the globe, including the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan.

The volunteering team quickly mobilised our pro-bono lawyers

to assist in urgent evacuation work. Applications needed to be submitted quickly for Afghani residents to flee to Australia before the local airports closed.

Our pro-bono lawyers worked around the clock to get these applications submitted.

Following the closure of Afghanistan airports, the team created the Family Reunion Clinic to assist 449 humanitarian visa holders apply for permanent residency. Meanwhile, our volunteers continued to support our Myanmar, Family Violence and Fast Track clinics.

There were several paralegal and night-service volunteer intakes throughout the year to meet the demand for our services. We inducted over 150 new paralegals, increasing our overall volunteer numbers to 600.

Volunteers were provided with dedicated training sessions across all our clinics and supervised by our lawyers to support them in the challenging and often confronting work they were doing.

Regular online meetings and catch ups ensured volunteers were connected, not only to Refugee Legal, but to one another. We incorporated daily online briefings into our clinic model for lawyers and paralegals to connect with supervisors and one another.

Regular meetings with our pro-bono partners provided opportunities for organisational updates and to get valuable feedback on our programs and how we can improve. The rotation of secondees from multiple law firms assisted us across all our services and was a vote of confidence in our ability to provide excellent supervision and well-rounded training.

Our volunteers come from a diverse range of backgrounds with a shared desire to contribute and make a positive impact for change. It is this diversity, generosity and common commitment that makes our volunteer culture so strong.

## From Our Interns



### Sam Stafford

After volunteering as a paralegal for the past three years I was excited to develop my knowledge and skills by undertaking an internship.

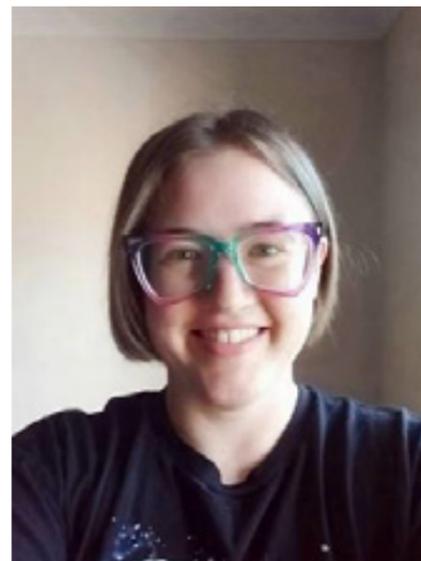
With the assistance of my supervising lawyer, I was given several challenging tasks that exposed the many layers of important work that Refugee Legal undertakes.

These included attending an Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT) hearing to witness first-hand the skill and nuance of advocacy, as well as undertaking in-depth country research that contributed to protection submissions. I enjoyed communicating directly with clients and listening to their unique and often confronting experiences.

On each occasion I was blown away by the respect, professionalism and empathy demonstrated by my supervising lawyer. Every day was different, and the work always felt important and rewarding. I was impressed by the camaraderie and passion shown by all at Refugee Legal.

Despite the challenging and relentless workload, everyone conducts themselves with humility and focus. As an aspiring lawyer this is simply inspiring.

After finishing my internship, I continue to volunteer at Refugee Legal and aspire to work in this field of law. It's a privilege to contribute to such an important, professional, and impactful organisation.



### Jay Atkins

My internship was part of the Public Interest Law Clinic at Melbourne Law School. Refugee Legal provided consistent support and feedback, while encouraging me to work independently on challenging legal tasks.

Refugee Legal's culture of open dialogue between legal practitioners and interns helped me to gain valuable insights into the realities of working as a lawyer in this area.

I completed a wide range of tasks in diverse areas of the law. I drafted statements of humanitarian claims for visa applications, transcribed departmental interviews and conducted targeted legal research into clients' countries of origin.

Engaging directly with clients was a central part of my role as an intern. All the clients I spoke to were grateful for the assistance

provided by both staff and volunteers. It was a great privilege to be able to assist clients to navigate the complex, and often harsh, process of seeking asylum in Australia.

My experience as an intern provided numerous opportunities to develop my legal knowledge and skills. More significantly, my experience helped me to develop a broader and deeper understanding of the world around me, and the experiences of refugees in Australia.

applications to character cancellations, assisted with matters before the Immigration Assessment Authority (IAA) and Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT), and helped draft policy papers.

The lawyers ensured I was never out of my depth but always challenged me and provided opportunities to learn new skills. By far the most rewarding aspect was the client-facing time afforded me every day, conducting interviews, and ultimately trying to help clients tell their story.



### Christian Boffa

After volunteering as a paralegal for two years I completed a six-month intensive placement as part of my practical legal training. I shadowed a senior lawyer through his daily tasks and worked on multiple client files across a range of practice areas from permanent and temporary protection

Through these interactions, you are reminded that at the centre of every regulatory and legislative entanglement is a human life. I would strongly recommend any law student with an interest in public law, international law or civil liberties apply to work with Refugee Legal.

## Educate

"While the move to online was initially done in response to the pandemic it has improved accessibility of the workshops to people in regional areas and across Australia. The move has also enabled us to increase the number of guest presenters and expand the scope of our CPD topics."

## Educate



Our education programs offered more targeted opportunities for professional development and expanded their reach into regional Victoria and around Australia through online delivery.

### Continuing Professional Development

The Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Program is a central element of our broader education program. We reviewed the program following the lifting of COVID 19 restrictions to identify areas for greater impact for staff, volunteers, and attendees of our workshops.

Our CPD Workshops continued online. While the move to online was initially in response to the pandemic, it has improved accessibility for people in regional areas and across Australia. The move enabled us to increase the number of guest presenters and expand the scope of our CPD topics. Attendances

remained strong over the past three years, and we plan to combine these online sessions with in-person workshops in the year ahead.

We ran targeted CPDs and training that responded to emerging areas of need to support the ongoing development of our volunteers and staff. For example, the Fast Track Clinic program provided formal and on-the-job training opportunities for volunteers. We provided regular family violence training to volunteers and front-line service providers in several community organisations. This targeted approach allowed those assisting Refugee Legal with service delivery to be upskilled to respond effectively to the needs of clients.

### Partnerships in Legal Education

Our partnerships with tertiary institutions such as Melbourne Law School and Monash

University achieved positive results for all involved, including staff, students, and Refugee Legal's clients.

### Community Education

Following the lifting of COVID restrictions, we resumed in-person community education and information sessions and expanded our community engagement activities across Victoria and beyond. Sessions were delivered in Mildura, Geelong, and metropolitan Melbourne as well as Canberra and Adelaide.

These sessions are typically delivered for support services that also work with refugees, asylum seekers and other migrants. Each session is tailored to address the specific needs of the support service and the clients they work with so that they can navigate the migration system and its complexities.

We intend to increase this work over the next 12 months. A significant focus will be to advise and assist Temporary Protection visa holders as they transition to permanent visas. Community education is critical to ensuring that people understand their rights and responsibilities and we are committed to ensuring that people have access to the information they need.

## Advocate

"Every day at Refugee Legal, we will be fearlessly advocating for major reform while continuing to defend the rights and lives of thousands of people who seek our help - through direct legal action for many and strategic litigation for systemic change."

## Advocate

### A Leading Voice

Refugee Legal played a key role in the implementation of the Global Refugee Forum 'Legal Community' Pledge, to mobilise the global legal community to address the acute unmet legal need of refugees and others forcibly displaced.

More than 100 legal and refugee rights organisations and groups joined the Pledge and already contributed more than 310,000 hours of pro bono assistance. New legal clinics were established, and new private/public sector pro bono models of legal service delivery developed. Staff from private sector Pledgers were seconded to legal aid NGOs.

As part of the post-Global Refugee Forum pledge process we collaborated with the International Core Legal Group and attended the Global Refugee Forum Core Group meeting to discuss mobilizing the global legal community in response to Afghanistan crisis.

In June 2022, we attended the UNHCR Global Consultations with NGOs in Geneva. A key theme was 'localisation', with a commitment to empowering national and local humanitarian action to ensure refugee communities and refugee-led organisations directly affected are front and centre in the shaping of responses.

This theme responded to the New York Declaration and the Global Compact on Refugees, which refer to the importance of engaging directly with forcibly displaced persons.

We addressed the 10th Annual UNHCR-NGO Strategic Litigation Roundtable, together with international colleagues, on the potential for strategic litigation to constrain government violations of refugees' rights and to enforce fundamental principles of international protection for people at risk.

We consulted with key UNHCR officials, including Gillian Triggs (Assistant UN High Commissioner), Andrew Harper (Special Advisor on Climate Action), Elizabeth Tan (new Director of International Protection) and Adrian Edwards, the Representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees UNHCR and the Jesuit Refugee Service in Rome.

### Meetings with Members of Parliament and Government Officials

We attended high-level meetings with key members of the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) - including as a member of the peak DHA-NGO dialogue - consultations with key Federal and State Parliamentarians across the political spectrum and meetings with the US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI).

We briefed the Victorian Government on key issues and needs, and our work in response to the Afghanistan crisis, as well as a wide range of refugee and immigration policy issues.

### An Active Voice

We participated in numerous high-level meetings and round tables, including with the sector, partner agencies, key advocates, and government, in relation to:

- Indefinite detention, including in relation to people held in detention in the Park Hotel Carlton, and Melbourne Immigration Transit Accommodation (MITA) and a legal strategy around the COVID-19 outbreak in the Park Hotel and recent Federal Court jurisprudence.
- TPV/SHEV reform.
- US Resettlement of refugees held in offshore detention.
- Crises in Afghanistan, Ukraine, and Myanmar.
- Final Departure Bridging Visas for people brought to Australia for medical treatment.
- The United Kingdom Nationality and Borders Act for asylum offshore in Rwanda.
- Access to financial support for people seeking asylum.
- The Offshore Humanitarian Intake.

## Advocate

We also sat on a number of Boards and Committees, including the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture Ethics Committee, the Peter McMullin Centre on Statelessness Advisory Board, the Refugee Leadership Group, the Steering Committee of the Refugee Leadership Alliance and the core group of the Global Refugee Forum Legal Community Pledge.

### Sector Meetings

We participated in high-level stakeholder meetings with the Victorian Multicultural Commission. We contributed to advocacy and policy priorities through our attendance at meetings with other organisations working in this sector, including the Refugee and Immigration National Community Law Coalition (RAINCLC), the Refugee Council of Australia, the Law Institute of Victoria (LIV) Refugee Reform Committee, the Australian Red Cross, the Network of Asylum Seeker Agencies (Victoria NASAVIC Network), Victoria Legal Aid, the Federation of Community Legal Centres, the National Asylum Policy, Advocacy Network (Victoria Branch), the Detention Advocacy Network, Anglicare, Australian Council for International Development (ACFID), the National Asylum Policy Network, Refugee Sector Advocacy and Campaigns Strategy Group, the National Advocacy Group for Women on Temporary Visas, the LIV Family Violence Working Group, the Pride Foundation Australia – LGBTIQ+ Refugee and Asylum Seeker Advisory Group and the Federation of Community Legal Centres.

### Submissions

We made detailed written submissions, and were invited to give oral testimony at hearings, to key Federal Parliamentary Inquiries, including:

- Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee Inquiry into the efficacy, fairness, timeliness, and costs of the processing and granting of visa classes which provide for or allow for family and partner reunions.
- Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security (PJCIS) inquiry into the Legislation Amendment (Strengthening Information Provisions) Bill 2020.
- Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee's inquiry into the performance and integrity of Australia's administrative review system.
- Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee Inquiry into the Migration Amendment (Strengthening the Character Test) Bill 2021.

### Media

We provided frequent public commentary to mainstream and alternative media organisations in Australia and overseas on a wide range of current asylum and immigration issues.

### Conferences, Presentations, Roundtables and Community Meetings

We made presentations to:

- The La Trobe University, The Ideas and Society Program on 'The Tragedy of Afghanistan: What can we do now?'
- The Victorian Afghan Associations Network (VAAN) launch of the Newly Arrived Afghans' Resettlement and Integration Support Program (NAARISP).
- The Grandmothers for Refugees event in conjunction with Australian Refugee Action Network in relation to the situation in Afghanistan and the legal needs of Afghans.
- The Australian Nurses and Midwives Federation Biennial National Conference on 'Freedom from Detention and a Fair Go for Refugees'.
- To students at the Castan Centre Clinic, Monash University to discuss Refugee Legal's work in relation to the Afghanistan crisis, human rights, and the law.
- The meeting of the Refugee Leadership Alliance (Asia Pacific region), and
- The Rotary Club of Balwyn dinner.

We were guest lecturers for:

- The Melbourne Law School Refugee Law course run by Professor Foster.
- The Melbourne Law School Human Rights Masters class.

We were panellists at:

- The Law Council of Australia 2022 Immigration Law Conference session on Afghan 449 visa holders and permanent humanitarian visa process.
- The International Women's Day event at Melbourne Law School.

We hosted online briefings for:

- Advocates in relation to Final Departure Bridging Visas re-applications with key advocates.
- ACFID staff with on the processing of Afghanistan visas in preparation for the Senate Committee Inquiry into Australia's Engagement in Afghanistan.

We attended:

- The Asia Pacific Meaningful Refugee Participation Roundtable hosted by Asia Pacific Network of Refugees (APNOR).
- The National Press Club address by Nyadol Nyuon, Chair of Harmony Alliance in Canberra.

- The roundtable with the Honourable Jaclyn Symes MP, Victoria's Attorney-General and Community Legal Centres.

- The Deakin University Careers Fair.

- The Melbourne Law Society Careers Fair.

- The 'Pillars of Light' Festival at Fed Square hosted by Rabbi Gabi.

- Attended Victorian Premier's Iftar Dinner 2022.

- The launch of The Michael Bowden Oval in Darwin – a "closing the gap" initiative.

- The sector leaders' roundtable hosted by Victorian Multicultural Commission

- The Social Impact Leadership Australia information session.

- The Victorian Multicultural Commission Gala Dinner.

- The Victorian Multicultural Committee, Victorian Refugee Awards Ceremony 2021.

## Thank You To Our Generous Supporters

As a non-profit organisation, Refugee Legal relies on the generous support of the community. We are grateful to all our supporters and acknowledge here the leadership, gifts and support of our major partners who make our work possible.

### Refugee Legal Supporters



### Refugee Legal Pro Bono Partners



Thanks also to our other major supporters: who include, Noel & Carmel O'Brien Family Foundation, B & A Miller Foundation, Karen McLeod Adair and Anthony Adair, Brigitte Smith, Lettisi Foundation, pro bono law firm partners, Jack and Hedy Brent Foundation, Krishna Somers Charitable Trust, Dawn Wade Foundation, Knox Foundation, Australian Philanthropic Services Foundation, Community Impact Foundation, Australian Community foundation, Rural Australians for Refugees Affiliated Groups, Manningham Uniting Church, Byron Anglican Parish, Montmorency Asylum Seekers Support Group, The Shepherd Family Foundation, Grandmothers Against Detention of Children, Bayside Refugee Advocacy and Support Association and a number of major donors and significant individual donors who prefer to remain anonymous.

## Refugee Legal Patrons



Her Excellency the Honourable Linda Dessau AM,  
Governor of Victoria (Patron in Chief)



The Honourable  
Michael Kirby AC CMG

## Ambassadors



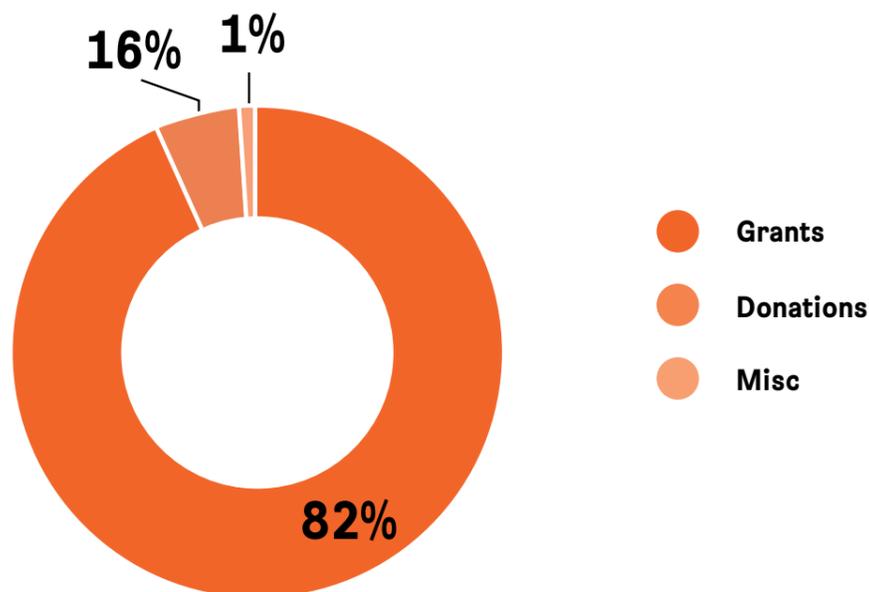
Special thanks go to two of our Ambassadors Tom Ballard, and First Dog on the Moon (aka Andrew Marlton) for helping to build our presence, expand our supporter base and raise much needed funds.

## Treasurer's Report

"We will continue to pursue plans to build and diversify our funding base underpinned by philanthropic and major donor grants and community donations, as well as government sources."

"Over the course of the financial year, Refugee Legal benefited from generous grants and donations ... as well as generous pro bono support from more than 20 corporate law firms. "

## Grants



## Treasurer's Report

Refugee Legal is pleased to report that it has ended the 2021/22 financial year in a sound financial position, reporting a solid operating surplus that will enable us to undertake core activities and plans in the years to come.

The total equity from 2020 to 2021 has increased from \$1,984,825 to \$3,959,892. This result is particularly pleasing, given the continued impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Total income from ordinary activities increased from \$2,893,160 to \$5,773,680.

Our expenditure on ordinary activities increased from \$2,703,684 to \$3,798,613. A significant part of the increased expense was attributable to the cost of work across the Afghanistan Program – involving a major scale-up and multi-dimensional response to people impacted by the Afghanistan crisis - particularly in areas of staffing costs and interpreter costs. This work and associated financial costs will continue over at least the next three years.

The operating surplus for the financial year was \$1,975,067.

This year our income from ordinary activities included \$935,354 (16%) from Donations and \$4,791,567 (83%) from Other Grants.

Over the course of the financial year, Refugee Legal benefited from generous grants and donations from numerous philanthropic organisations, major donors and individuals from the community, the Victorian State Government, the Commonwealth Government (to support people impacted by the crisis in Australia), as well as generous pro bono support from more than 20 corporate law firms.

To tackle the ongoing funding challenges of the past few years, in the context of unprecedented and ever-escalating demand for our services, and more recently the COVID-19 pandemic, Refugee Legal will continue to implement a range of strategies focused on building and diversifying funding sources, together with and to further leverage pro bono, volunteer and other in-kind costs resources.

As of 30 June 2022, Refugee Legal has total equity of \$3,959,892 and total current assets of \$5,377,424. The total current assets include \$722,867 of grants received in advance to undertake our core services.

Refugee Legal is in a sound financial position for the 2022-23 financial year, particularly in light of grants received in advance to plan and deliver our core services in the context of the continued and escalating need for these services, and to seize opportunities which present to advocate for reform. We will continue to pursue plans to build and diversify our funding base underpinned by philanthropic and major donor grants and community donations, as well as government sources.

## Financial Summary

### Income and expenditure in summary

Income 2021-2022	2022	2021
Other Grants	\$4,791,567	\$1,366,670
Professional Dev & Training Courses	\$5,609	\$1,058
Donations	\$935,354	\$828,559
Interest Income	\$5,252	\$560
Other Income	\$ 35,898	\$696,313
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$5,773,680</b>	<b>\$2,893,160</b>
<b>Expenditure 2021-2022</b>		
Auditor's Remuneration	\$6,000	\$6,750
Bank Charges	\$489	\$5,516
Depreciation	\$4,706	\$4,282
General Expenses	\$15,590	\$28,942
Insurance	\$43,946	\$7,804
Interpreters	\$264,996	\$67,493
Postage	\$5,003	\$3,711
Professional Dev & Training Courses	\$2,090	\$1,237
Publications & Subscriptions	\$23,071	\$22,751
RASSA	\$43,486	
Rent	\$178,435	\$177,757
Repairs & Maintenance, Consumables	\$80,620	\$33,034
Salaries (including packaged benefits)	\$2,867,803	\$2,124,158
Stationery, Office Supplies	\$13,301	\$17,570
Staff Training, Seminars & Conferences	\$551	\$1,200
Superannuation	\$254,096	\$176,129
Telephone & Fax	\$13,574	\$17,192
Travel & Accommodation	\$13,936	\$2,120
Workcover	\$6,950	\$6,038
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$3,798,613</b>	<b>\$2,703,684</b>
<b>Surplus after income tax expenses</b>	<b>\$1,975,067</b>	<b>\$189,476</b>
<b>Net Assets</b>	<b>\$3,959,892</b>	<b>\$1,984,825</b>

## Our Staff

### Executive Director/ Principal Solicitor

David Manne

### Business Manager

Linda Budd

### Volunteer Coordinator

Harmonie Cribbes

### Manager Special Programs

Bianca DeToma

Ann Clark

### Senior Solicitors

Cassandra Benjamin

Sophie de Rohan

Angela Dwyer

Benjamin Goulding

Virajith Hewaarachchi

Priscilla Jamieson

Rebecca Webb

Sally Szmerning

### Solicitors

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Adrienne Anderson

Paola Aristizabal Ramirez

Jennifer Blakeman

Shelley Burchfield

Emma Costa

Amy Faram

Amelia Faraone

Filip Gelev

Drita Halimi

Katherine Ho

Clare Davis

Galen Jaffurs

Yoko Kamada

Malek Kazimi

Daniel Macpherson

Jahangir Mahmood

Andrea Main

Savanah Marques

Rachel Mason

Sanja Nenadic

Thomas St John

Lauri Stewart

Rohan Thwaites

Anna Woods

Natasha Yacoub

Catherine Zhao

### Executive Assistant

Melissa Green

### Administration Support

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Alexandra Antonowicz

Mary Alem Bekele

Patricia Castro

Phillip Geoghegan

Clare Graham-Stewart

James Grant

Jock Green

Benjamin Halstead

Emily Heng

Sophie Hunt

Aisha Ismail

Iona Moller

Kasia Odell

Isobel Orford

Stephanie Pitt

Rosalie Ritter-Jones

Victoria Schucht

Nayomi Sivasubramaniam

Sonia Soosaithasan

Emily Timewell

Zara Wotherspoon

## Committee of Management

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Clare Morton

### Vice-President

Andrew Hamilton

### Secretary

Katie Howie

### Treasurer

Michael Taylor-Sands

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Sasha Findlay

Dr Savitri Taylor

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Priscilla Jamieson

George Lekakis AO

Eve Lester

Walter Lippman

Ron Merkel

Justice Debbie Mortimer

Clare Morton

Richard Niall KC

Katherine Rechtman

## Acknowledgements

This annual report has been produced collaboratively by the Refugee Legal team.

### Editing

Mark Madden

David Manne

Linda Budd

Priscilla Jamieson

### Design

Studio Round

### Photography credits

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## The arc of history

In the words of Eleanor Roosevelt, the Chair of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Drafting Committee, "Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home - so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. [...] Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world."

That's why you and your support for Refugee Legal, and those we assist, is so vital, so valuable and so powerful.

Thank you,

**David Manne**  
**Executive Director**  
**Refugee Legal**

# Refugees

# Asylum seekers

# Vulnerable migrants