

Refugee Legal: Defending the Rights of Refugees



Acknowledgement 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.

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 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 and lawyers, 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 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.

Our Values in Action



Human dignity and human rights

Every person is equal in dignity and rights and is valued and respected. Human rights are universal; they derive from the inherent dignity of every person.

The international human rights framework and the rule of law underpin the work that we do. We respect basic rights and freedoms and promote inclusive, equality-based, non-racist, non-discriminatory immigration, citizenship and refugee law, policy and procedures.

In this context, we live in a diverse multi-lingual, multicultural society and value and respect people for who they are, what they believe in and how they wish to live their lives. Our services are safe, reliable, accessible and responsive.

Effective

We aim to make a positive impact on the lives of our clients, families and communities, our staff and volunteers and our supporters and partners. We use our expertise, practical skills and resources strategically to adapt and adjust to meet client and community needs and maximise the broader impact of our work.

Empathy and compassion

Empathy and compassion help us understand the perspectives, concerns, needs and feelings of our clients and drive our desire to assist.

Integrity

We do what we say and say what we do. We live our values. We treat others the way we would like to be treated ourselves. We are accountable, honest and take responsibility for our decisions and actions. We embrace diversity and different perspectives. We are prepared to tackle complex and challenging problems. We are experts in our field and maintain the highest professional and ethical standards.

From our President and Executive Director

"It's one thing to be watching tragedies unfold on the nightly news. It's another thing altogether to actually be able to do something about it now. Something that can change the course of someone's life for the better."

These words are often spoken by our pro bono partners, staff and volunteers. They speak to deeper truths about the values we hold dear and the kind of community and world we want to live in.



A community and world where the law can and should achieve justice for all, not just the powerful and the privileged, no matter who you are or where you're from. A community and world powered by compassion and humanity.

Refugee Legal is ultimately the expression of that community will, a commitment to act and a belief that we can and must make a difference.

35 years ago, Refugee Legal was founded by a remarkable and diverse group of people. It sprang from a simple, core conviction that no matter who

you are or where you're from, you should be able to get a fair go before the law — and that the law in this area had become so complex and onerous that legal assistance was essential.

Every single day since, the truth of this conviction has been borne out. We have assisted people seeking protection from persecution, safety from family violence, freedom from detention and reunion with family. We continue to provide legal education, advocacy and law reform to promote fair, just, humane refugee and migration policies in accordance with human rights and the rule of law.

From our President and Executive Director (cont.)

It started with one lawyer working three days per week from a lounge room coffee table helping a handful of people to apply for asylum.

From giving legal help to **several hundred**, our total client assistance is now over **17,000** in this financial year. We can rapidly respond to large-scale needs resulting from international crises in places like Afghanistan, Myanmar and Ukraine. We have established a service in South Australia as a result of a merger last year.

We have moved from sitting around a coffee table to sitting at the conference table with major policymakers at the national and international levels. Refugee Legal is now a strong and sustained voice for change in the public domain. We have prevailed in 10 out of 10 High Court strategic test cases.

All because of our community's will for justice for all, with compassion and common humanity; to be there for people when they need it most.

In all areas of our work, partnerships and collaboration have been central.

We have developed a vast network of volunteers, pro bono corporate law firms, NGO sector agencies, leading law schools, UNHCR and international bodies which has immeasurably expanded our capacity to address legal need.



The work of Refugee Legal could not be done without the profound generosity of the growing group of major donors, philanthropic foundations and many other private donors. Their fundamental belief in this work has been matched with concrete support. We have also received important support from the current Federal and Victorian Governments.

Our pro bono partnership program is unique with 24 firms bringing hundreds of lawyers, harnessing the deep reservoir of goodwill in the private sector.

These partnerships underscore the powerful potential of the private sector to advance protection for refugees globally, and this partnership model is at the heart of an international initiative — the UNHCR Global Refugee Forum. We are co-founders of a Core Group for the global community legal pledge to increase access to legal help for refugees to seek protection globally.

The year brought the move to new premises, officially opened by the national head of refugee policy and the international head of refugee policy, Minister Andrew Giles and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi. It was a great honour to welcome them to our new home.

The opening also included the official launch of our Strategic Plan 2023–25 which brings together our aspirations, vision, purpose, objectives and values. It sets out the challenges we face and the guiding framework that will assist us to determine our priority actions for the next three years.

This framework is informing important changes which focus on developing and expanding key areas of our existing work. These include:

- Investing more in our work supporting survivors of family violence, elevating the work from thematic priority in our core services to a dedicated program. This involves an integrated approach combining legal assistance, policy and advocacy, community engagement and empowerment.
- Increasing our capacity to rapidly scale up to respond to large-scale legal needs, including through our special legal clinic model — such as the TPV Conversion to Permanency Clinics and the Afghan Program Clinics.
- Expanding our work to amplify the voices of refugees, people seeking asylum and migrants, ensuring that our policy formulation and advocacy continue to draw directly upon the experiences and perspectives of our clients and their communities, and to champion their distinct voices.
- Scaling up of our community information and education programs and our work with community organisations and other partners to improve knowledge, skills, capability and capacity, while also retaining a core component of our professional legal training and development programs.
- Expanding resources for policy and advocacy in response to the ongoing major impact of our work, and the significant and exciting opportunities which present in this era of reform to maximise our impact in securing fundamental change in policy and law.
- Implementing our new Digital Strategy to ensure current and appropriate technology is effectively used to support staff, volunteers and clients.
- Investing further in our pro bono law firm partnerships and in our new legal service arm in South Australia — Refugee Legal South Australia.

Thank you to our staff and volunteers — the backbone of Refugee Legal. Every day your extraordinary commitment, dedication and skill personify and amplify the community's will for justice, and the remarkable demonstration of compassion and common humanity in the service of our clients.

Thank you also to Committee members for your continued wisdom, strategic guidance and dedication to the defence of the rights of refugees and disadvantaged migrants' rights, and to the sustainability of Refugee Legal.

Defending the rights of refugees and migrants is a global challenge and the scale of people forced from their homes continues to soar. But the fact is: global humanitarian crises know no barriers. And these crises reverberate locally. This is illustrated throughout the report by the multitude of areas in which we responded to people and communities in need, think Afghanistan, Myanmar, Ukraine to name a few.

Refugee Legal is an essential and emergency service in the community. We make a difference. Our work gives hope. And it brings hope. It changes lives.

It is why we love doing what we do.

Clare Morton
President

David Manne
Executive Director

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.

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.

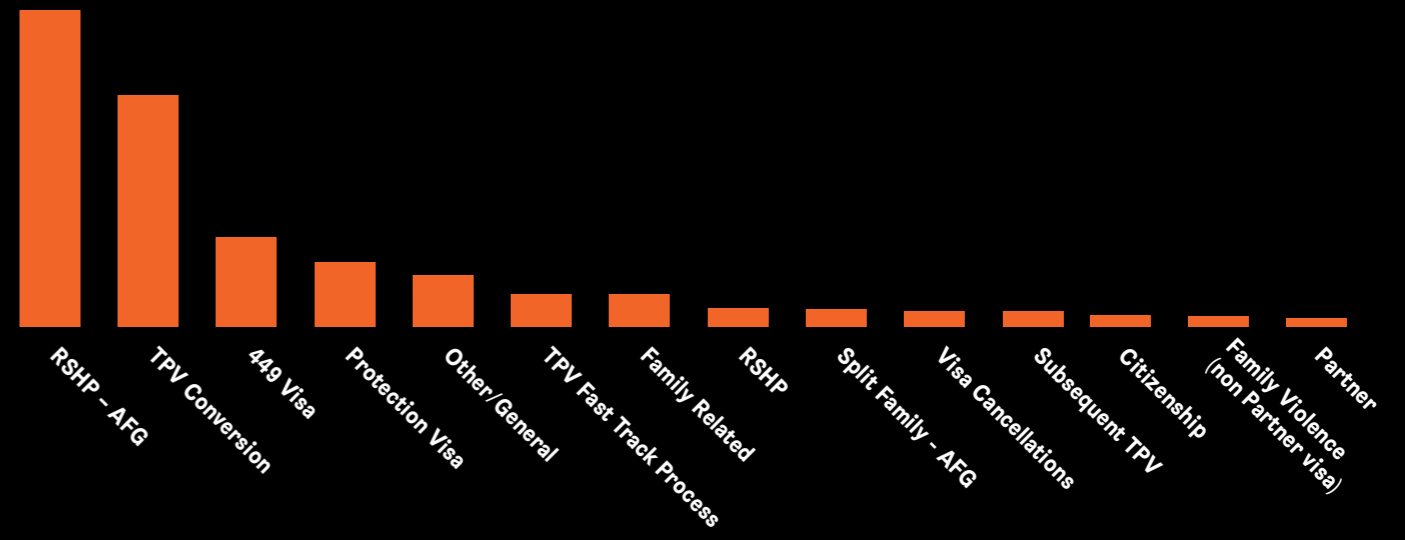
Advocate

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.

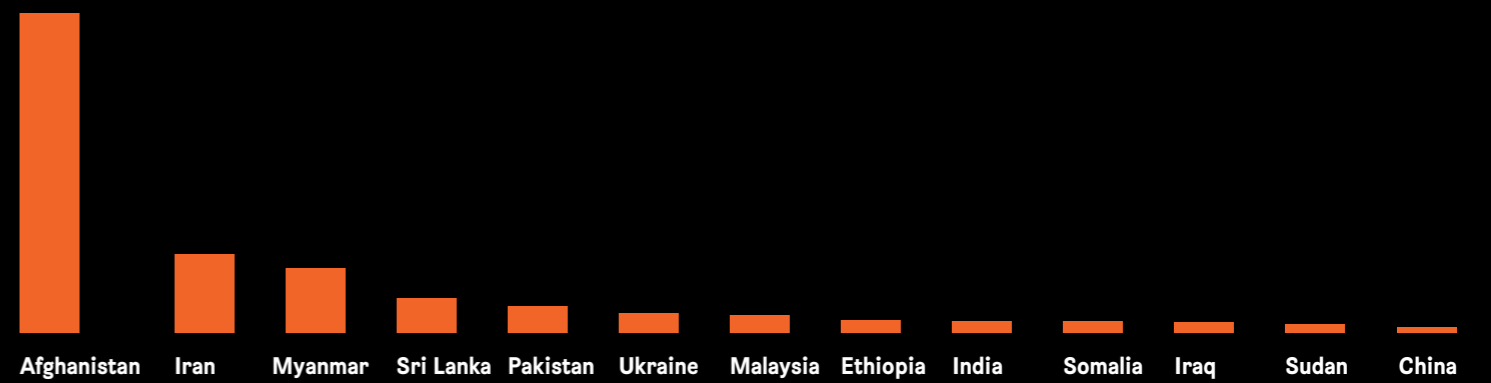
The Numbers for 2022/2023

Total Client Assistance	17,254
Telephone Advice	6,685
Face-to-face Advice	4,228
People Represented	2,167
Clinic assistance	4,174

No. of Matters



No. of Clients



Advise and Assist

"As a result of our work, people were able to secure a safe and protected future in Australia whether they were students fearing the military government in Myanmar, Iranians expressing political and religious beliefs not supported by their government, women fleeing oppression and violence in their home countries or a myriad of people from all over the globe fleeing political, religious, gender and sexuality-based persecution."

Refugee Legal's dedicated team of lawyers, supported by our administrative staff, volunteers and pro bono partners, continued to work together tirelessly to provide expert legal advice in response to the unceasing and escalating demand across all our services.

This escalating demand is driven by ongoing crises in Afghanistan, Myanmar and Ukraine, as well as ongoing challenges with processing delays and constant and complex changes in the policy landscape.

Thousands of people received vital legal advice and assistance through our twice weekly telephone advice service, the weekly evening advice service, the Family Violence Program as well as through our ongoing casework assistance and clinic services.

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 the merit appeals processes.

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 of our work with many applications lodged for Partner, Child and Orphan Relative visas as well as under the split family provisions of the offshore humanitarian program.

We assisted clients:

- to understand the complex legal tests they need to meet to be eligible for a visa;

- with the onerous practical and evidentiary requirements to lodge a valid application and evidence for their claims;
- respond to written requests for further information;
- prepare for and attend interviews and hearings; and
- prepare legal submissions supporting the clients' cases for meeting the protection and other visa requirements.

Our work also included ensuring access to work rights where available, as well as making referrals to relevant health and practical support services.

In addition to our comprehensive response to the ongoing crisis in Afghanistan, we continued to provide legal help to many Ukrainians fleeing the war and to people from Sudan to apply for protection in Australia. Through our Myanmar Legal Clinic, we assisted large numbers of clients to present their claims and evidence in a manner which enabled speedy and successful grants of visas.

We provided assistance to people facing cancellation of visas for allegedly providing incorrect information, to people facing issues with processing of citizenship applications and those facing visa cancellation or refusal

on character grounds, and to many people in Australia transferred from offshore regional processing centres who continue to face ongoing uncertainty about their futures.

We continued to protect the legal rights of clients in detention to pursue their claims and seek liberty. On several occasions, our team sought and was granted injunctions by the courts so that clients could not be removed from Australia while their claims for protection were assessed.

Our work with long term detainees resulted in the release to freedom of people otherwise facing indefinite detention and we continue to advocate on this as an area of priority.

While there were many positive visa outcomes for clients and encouraging trends in processing and policy, challenges remain. Prolonged delays, often for many years, in processing of applications at the primary and merits review stages continue to adversely impact people.

As a result of our work, people were able to secure a safe and protected future in Australia whether they were students fearing the military government in Myanmar, Iranians expressing political and religious beliefs antithetical to their regime, women fleeing oppression and violence in their home countries and a myriad of people from all over the globe fleeing political, religious, gender and sexuality-based persecution.

Fast Track and TPV/SHEV Conversion

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. Since that time, our team, with the help of our pro bono partners has assisted thousands to apply for Temporary Protection and Safe Haven Enterprise (TPV/SHEV) visas. Many of these people had been waiting to have their cases heard since 2012.

This year, the Fast Track Clinic has focused on large-scale legal assistance to clients needing help with TPV/SHEV conversion to permanency. In February, the Government announced the long-awaited policy reform in relation to conversion of TPV/SHEVs to permanent visas – the Resolution of Status (RoS) visa. This was wonderful, momentous news for the over 19,000 people who've been suffering in limbo for a decade or more. It is common sense, humane and transformative.

We have developed strategies to respond to these changes, focused primarily on provision of information, legal advice and assistance to people impacted by the changes, as well as key stakeholders and supporters.

In Victoria, there were approximately 3,500 people eligible to apply for RoS visas. In South Australia, the number of people is approximately 700 (see further information under Refugee Legal (SA)).

To meet the demand, we have mobilised the assistance of our pro bono law firm partners to provide us with large amounts of lawyers to assist. Most of our 24 pro bono law firm partners have provided teams of lawyers to work with us on this program.

There are four key elements to this program:

(i) Applications for permanent RoS visas

Since 14 February, the TPV Conversion team has lodged hundreds of RoS visa applications, for thousands of applicants.

(ii) Requests for reassessment – Ministerial Intervention

We are assisting clients with requests for Ministerial Intervention where their applications for protection have been refused, but where they have compelling needs, for example due to changed country circumstances such as in Myanmar or Afghanistan.

(iii) Family reunion

We have set up a family reunion clinic to assist RoS holders to apply for family members to migrate to Australia. Many of these clients have been separated from family for over 10 years.

(iv) Initial applications for protection

We continue to provide legal assistance to people still undergoing processing of their initial application for protection at the primary or merits review stages. Departmental figures show there are still over 1,800 people (out of approximately 30,000) in this situation nationally. If people are approved, they will be eligible for a RoS visa.

With our team of pro bono partners, our lawyers work together with a renewed sense of purpose to assist refugees finally achieve a sense of permanency and security after years in limbo.

Refugee Legal South Australia

Following extensive consultation and community engagement, Refugee Legal and 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.

Since that time, Refugee Legal has worked tirelessly to provide legal services to asylum seekers and vulnerable migrants across South Australia. Our initial focus was to maintain the existing service but, with great legal need presenting itself, we look towards development of the service to meet that need.

We have continued to build on relationships and partnerships across the sector to assess and address legal need. With clients seeking help at all stages of the protection visa application process, Ministerial intervention, family reunion and conversion from temporary to permanent visas, there is high demand for a specialist legal service in South Australia.

Community engagement and delivery of community legal education is a core priority for the development of our work in SA. We know from our decades of experience that great legal need can present itself in rural and remote locations. In the last year, our team delivered

education sessions in Naracoorte and Bordertown, with a focus on RoS conversion (see Fast Track section in this report), family reunion and permanent protection visa applications.

We look forward to an exciting year ahead further developing services to deliver the essential assistance needed to meet the demand for legal help from many vulnerable people in the SA community.



Family Violence Program

"Our family violence services aim to give vulnerable women and children the best chance to rebuild their lives in safety."

People impacted by family violence on temporary visas, or without visas, are incredibly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Clients seeking our assistance have multiple and complex vulnerabilities and demand for assistance has continued to grow.

To meet this growing demand, and in recognition that supporting women and children impacted by family violence continues to be a significant part of our legal, policy and advocacy work, we continued to expand our services and are transitioning to a formal Family Violence Program, underpinned by an integrated strategy of legal assistance, reform and community empowerment.

Services include one-off advice and full application assistance for women to put their cases for protection, or in relation to partner visas and other migration matters. In many cases this direct assistance has enabled vulnerable women to access their own visa pathway, so they are no longer dependent on a violent partner for their visa.

Our day advice service continued with weekly appointments supervised by our family violence legal team and conducted by lawyers from our pro bono partners.

We work closely with other support services in the family violence sector, both legal and non-legal, to ensure that clients receive the specialist support they need.



We acknowledge that, while most clients impacted by family violence are women and children, they are not the only ones who experience such 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 close connections with LGBTIQ+ support organisations mean these vulnerable clients are able to access support services while addressing their legal need.

We continue to take a leading role in policy and advocacy in the area of family violence and migration.

We have engaged directly with Department of Home Affairs in a number of ways, including in consultations and with written submissions.

We take an active role on the National Advocacy Group on Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence and work with our colleagues across a variety of legal and non-legal services to advocate for a new visa for women experiencing family violence.

Afghanistan Legal Program

"Although no longer headline news, the crisis in Afghanistan has continued unabated and the situation for those who remain there is perilous."



Refugee Legal continued to provide legal advice and assistance to people from the Afghan community in Australia who remain distressed by the intractable situation of family members in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries.

Work with visa applicants from Afghanistan and family members has continued across all legal services, including protection visa applications, partner, child and other family visas, resolution of status, cancellations, requests for ministerial intervention and in the Refugee and Special Humanitarian visa program.

NGO and Aid Workers

Our work with international agencies has continued, and we have worked together to advocate for the processing of applications lodged by individuals at increased risk of persecution by the Taliban, including aid workers and high profile professional women.

Family Reunion Clinic

Demand has remained high in our family reunion clinic. We have continued to assist members of the Australian Afghan community to make refugee and humanitarian visa applications for their family members who remain at risk of harm. This work is assisted by 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 partners, 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 supports clients through the process.

449 Visa Program

Since the Taliban takeover in August 2021, more than 2000 Afghans have been evacuated to Victoria on temporary subclass 449 humanitarian stay visas.

Refugee Legal has provided large-scale free 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 have continued to work with those clients granted permanent residence to lodge 'split-family' applications and provided advice about visa options for other family who remain at risk of harm.

Special Projects and Policy Unit

"The core purpose of the Unit within Refugee Legal is to identify, investigate and effectively respond to serious and systemic issues in refugee and migration law, policy and practice. The objectives of the Unit are underpinned by our commitment to secure policies and laws in the refugee and migration areas which are fair, just, equitable, humane and consistent with human rights obligations and the rule of law."

The Refugee Legal Special Projects and Policy Unit (the Unit) continued to make a major and sustained contribution to improving public policy and practice in the administration of migration and refugee law, while directly helping many thousands of people seeking protection from persecution for themselves and families in danger overseas.

This year the Unit has focused on:

- the development of policy positions and reform proposals to seek accountability and change.
- advocacy for change in public, policy and political decision-making at local, national and international levels, including high-level engagement with key policy-makers.
- strategic approaches to challenging systemic injustices through the development of enhanced legal protections for many, particularly through the use of strategic litigation.
- advancing public awareness, understanding and discourse; inspiring ideas and collaborations; and building action for change.
- direct engagement with key policymakers on areas of reform priority.

The work of the Unit continued to make a major and significant influence and impact in shaping reform, including in test case litigation in a range of matters. This included the continued development of reform proposals, focused on:

- alternatives to detention;
- TPV/SHEV conversion to permanent residence;
- options for people refused a TPV/SHEV, and family reunion;
- supports for people in the community seeking asylum, including Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS);
- family violence; and
- visa processing, including addressing primary and merits review delays and backlogs.

In particular, specific focus has been on reform of processing regimes at the primary and merits review stages, including:

- further development of an own-motion proposal on reform of Departmental visa processing, including protection visas; and
- development of formal submissions on the new merits review body reform.

Additionally, Refugee Legal commenced test case litigation for people who had been refused protection visas under the fast-track process and who, despite seeking reconsideration of their claims, were facing imminent removal. In all cases, the court granted injunctions preventing removal and our clients were able to continue to put their case for reassessment of their protection claims.

The work in the Unit also helps shape policy and reform, including through significant work undertaken in the implementation of the Global Refugee Forum (GRF) 'Legal Community' Pledge (refer to Advocate section for further information).

Refugee Legal Strategic Plan 2023–25

"This Strategic Plan 2023–25 brings together Refugee Legal's aspirations — our vision, purpose, objectives and values — in one document to tell the story of who we are, why we exist, what we do, and how we want to do it."

Launch of Strategic Plan and Opening of New Premises



Refugee Legal's Strategic Plan for 2023–25 was launched at the opening of the new Refugee Legal office by the Minister for Immigration, Andrew Giles, and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi.

More than 150 people from the sector, including staff, volunteers and pro bono partners attended.

The new premises at 333 Exhibition Street Melbourne are more accessible and modern and situated near multiple public transport routes.

The Strategic Plan brings together Refugee Legal's aspirations: our vision, purpose, objectives and values.

It sets out the challenges we face, the guiding framework that will assist us and the priority actions for the next three years as we continue to advise and assist, educate, advocate and operate sustainably.

The plan is underpinned by the core purpose that has informed and driven our work since day one, over 35 years ago: to promote and protect the rights of refugees, people seeking asylum and vulnerable migrants, to advise and assist as many people as possible who are most in need as effectively as possible and to work for change to secure just and humane treatment for all.

Under the plan our work for survivors of family violence has been elevated from a thematic priority in our core services to a dedicated program which involves an integrated approach combining legal assistance, policy and advocacy and community engagement and empowerment.

We will invest in our capacity to scale up quickly to respond to large-scale legal needs, including through our special legal clinic model, such as the TPV Conversion to Permanency Clinics and the Afghan Program Clinics.

In this era of reform, we will scale up our policy unit and increase our policy and advocacy activities in response to the significant and exciting opportunities to secure fundamental change in policy and law.

In doing, so we will amplify the voices of refugees, people seeking asylum and migrants, ensuring that our policy formulation and advocacy continue to directly draw upon the experiences and perspectives of our clients and their communities, and champion their distinct voices.

We will scale up our community information and education programs, working with community organisations and other partners to improve knowledge, skills, capability and capacity, while also retaining a core component of our professional legal training and development programs.

We are implementing our new digital strategy to ensure current and appropriate technology is effectively used to support staff, volunteers and clients and investing further in our pro bono law firm partnerships and our new legal service arm in South Australia — Refugee Legal South Australia.

We are also implementing our wellbeing strategy to integrate wellbeing considerations into all interactions, systems and processes.

Stories of Courage and Hope

"After 10 years of living in limbo, he is now able to move on with his life. He has secure employment and stable accommodation."

Case Studies

From fear to living safely

Maya came to Australia in 2020 to study engineering. Her visa expired in May 2021. The military coup of February 2021 meant she was unable to safely return to Myanmar. She was terrified of being deported. Through a friend, she met a man who said he could help her to get her a visa, for a fee. Maya didn't know her rights and options and did not have much money but believed she had no choice but to pay the amount requested. She wasn't told the kind of visa that was applied for, but believed it was a bridging visa. She later discovered it was a protection visa and that it had been refused.

Maya contacted Refugee Legal for help. We found that all the information in the protection visa application was false. She was unaware of this. Refugee Legal provided full legal representation before the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT). We presented her true and correct claims, and the AAT made a positive finding in her case quickly, without holding a hearing. Maya was granted a permanent protection visa to live in safety in Australia.

No longer in limbo

Nilan arrived by boat from Sri Lanka in 2013. He was prohibited from applying for any kind of visa until 2016, when he was assessed through the then Commonwealth Government's Fast Track process. He was granted a five-year SHEV

visa in 2017. He did not apply for a subsequent visa before his initial visa expired as he had moved and the notice had been sent to his old address. As a result of his visa status, he was unable to work and ended up homeless, living in his car.

Nilan asked Refugee Legal for help. We decided he needed personal permission from the Minister to lodge an application for a resolution of status visa and made the case. The permission was quickly given. His visa application was lodged through our clinic and the visa was granted soon after.

After 10 years of living in limbo, Nilan is now able to move on with his life. He has secure employment and stable accommodation.

Family violence

Anika arrived in Australia from Malaysia in 2016 on a visitor visa with her young son. While on holiday, she met Aakesh and they fell in love. After Anika returned to Malaysia, Aakesh sponsored her to return to Australia as his fiancé on a prospective marriage visa. Anika became pregnant with their child.

When Anika arrived in Australia, Aakesh became violent towards her. Not long after this, Anika gave birth to their daughter.

Following one particularly violent incident, Anika called the police and they attended and took out an invention order against Aakesh.

Anika and her children were assisted to enter a family violence refuge and were referred to us for immigration advice.

Anika was very worried about what would happen to herself and her children. She was scared that if she didn't stay with Aakesh she would have to leave Australia. When speaking with our lawyer, Anika revealed that her son's father in Malaysia had also been violent towards her over the course of many years and had threatened to kill her and take her son.

We assisted Anika to lodge an application for a protection visa so that she could remain safely with her children in Australia. This was refused by the Department of Home Affairs without interview. We then assisted Anika to appeal to the AAT. We argued that Anika would face harm in Malaysia and that she would not be protected by the Malaysian authorities. The Tribunal believed there was a real and significant chance of serious harm to Anika if she returned to Malaysia. After a seven-year battle, Anika was finally found to be owed protection. Anika and her children can now rebuild their lives in dignity and safety.

Volunteer Program

"Our volunteers serve as a constant reminder that the spirit of goodwill remains vibrant within our community, and that there are individuals eager to seize opportunities to effect positive change."



Our remarkable team of volunteers, pro bono lawyers, paralegals and university partners are essential to everything we do – each and every year.

Our pro bono law firm partnerships is a program which is unique in scale globally and has been recognised as international best practice.

Our university partners include: University of Melbourne; Australian Catholic University; Monash University; RMIT; Swinburne University of Technology and Deakin University.

Our program continues to expand. Our volunteer community now includes more than 600 dedicated individuals and our pro bono partnerships with law firms

have grown to 24. Our internship program has also grown and our connections with universities have been strengthened.

Our volunteer program and pro bono relationships allow us to respond to urgent and escalating needs swiftly and effectively. In times of crisis and growing demand, the power of our dedicated volunteers and the generosity of pro bono partners come to the fore. This was particularly evident with the rapid response to the TPV Conversion Clinic and the crises in Afghanistan, Myanmar and Ukraine.

This year brought the return of volunteers to our offices, a heart-warming shift following the challenges posed by COVID 19.

The return of volunteers on site reignited enthusiasm all round, reminding us of the power of community and of the impact our volunteers have within the office and beyond.

Our volunteers assist clients with the guidance and support of our experienced lawyers. Their diverse backgrounds bring a wealth of expertise to our team and our tailored training ensures they have the essential knowledge and skills to provide well-informed advice.

We have expanded our university partnerships, primarily to provide students with opportunities to work with Refugee Legal. We have actively fostered relationships with diverse academic institutions. We believe in the power of education and collaboration and, by nurturing these connections, we're not only preparing the next generation of professionals but also enriching our own work with their knowledge and enthusiasm.

Our volunteers serve as a constant reminder that the spirit of goodwill remains vibrant within our community and that there are individuals eager to seize opportunities to effect positive change. The remarkable diversity of our volunteers enriches our organisation and expands our impact.

From our Interns

"It is a fantastic and privileged opportunity to be able to give back to the community and develop a deeper understanding of the issues facing vulnerable persons around the world and refugees and asylum seekers in Australia."



Phillipa Mitchell (Pipi)

I volunteered with Refugee Legal for nine months, then completed an Independent Legal Internship facilitated by the University of Melbourne.

I worked two days a week under the supervision of a senior lawyer and, with assistance, completed a diverse range of tasks including drafting statements for visa applications, post-interview submissions, work rights requests and in-depth country of origin research.

On a number of occasions, this involved direct client contact and liaising with other support services. These interactions were incredibly valuable. I learned how to communicate via interpreters and became familiar with the

diverse range of services available to ensure that clients had a network of supports in Australia. Liaising with these services on behalf of a client was a great way to 'dip my toes' into the world of advocacy.

An internship at Refugee Legal is a hands-on experience that I would recommend to anyone who is interested in the intricacies and complexities of migration and refugee law.

More importantly, it is a fantastic and privileged opportunity to be able to give back to the community and develop a deeper understanding of the issues facing vulnerable persons around the world and refugees and asylum seekers in Australia.



Bethany Wilkinson

After volunteering at Refugee Legal as a paralegal for nearly two years, I was fortunate enough to go on and complete my practical legal training.

The technical and interpersonal skills that I have gained from being a part of Refugee Legal have had a lasting impact on me professionally.

During my legal traineeship, I assisted multiple clients in their visa applications, drafting statutory declarations as a key piece of evidence to substantiate their protection claims.

I engaged directly with transgender women and young single mothers who would face persecution if they returned to their country of birth. Interviewing these clients is an experience I will never forget. Ultimately, you are directly helping an individual to evade harm or further harm.

I found speaking with clients the most enjoyable part of my experience. Working at Refugee Legal provides a constant reminder of the human element in law and the power you can bring to those seeking its protection.

I feel privileged to have worked with the team at Refugee Legal and I continue to carry a strong interest in human rights and refugee law. I strongly recommend any law student to volunteer and any law graduate to commence their practical legal training with Refugee Legal. You are bound to become a better person and lawyer because of it.



Angus Thompson

At Refugee Legal, I completed a Practical Legal Training Placement over a five month period where I interned under the supervision of a lawyer. During that internship,

I shadowed my supervising solicitor and assisted with various client matters ranging from protection visa applications to visa cancellations. I was given the opportunity to not only research for and help prepare legal documents vital for said matters, but also to interview and converse with clients. The latter for me was the most rewarding part of my time at Refugee Legal as I really enjoyed getting to know clients and better understanding their perspectives and stories. Though I have greatly benefitted from the internship with regards to the skills I have acquired, I feel as though the environment at Refugee Legal was what made it a fantastic experience. Everyone working here has a unified goal and is genuinely passionate about what they do, which is just incredibly enriching to be around. As a person who already had the ambition to work in public interest law and, more specifically, refugee law, my passion for these areas has only been cemented by my time with this hugely important organisation. I strongly recommend to any law student, legal professional or person with an interest to apply to join the team at Refugee Legal.

Educate

“The Federal Government’s change in policy in February 2023, allowing TPV/SHEV holders, former holders or applicants to apply for permanent Resolution of Status visas was a particular focus for training of our staff and volunteers.”



Continuing Professional Development

Our CPD Workshops, directed at lawyers and registered migration agents to update skills and knowledge, continued to be presented online, enabling our interstate practitioner volunteers and others to participate.

The program focused on areas of migration law directly relevant to our practice, including all aspects of the protection visa process, family migration and visa cancellations.

The Federal Government’s change in policy in February 2023, allowing TPV/SHEV holders, former holders or applicants to apply for permanent Resolution of Status visas, was a particular focus for training of our staff and volunteers.

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

Community education sessions were delivered in person and online across Victoria and interstate, including Shepparton, Geelong, Swan Hill, Naracoorte and Darwin.

These sessions were directed to communities with emerging legal need, including groups from Ukraine and Myanmar.

A number of community information sessions were also held to ensure that people eligible to apply for permanent resolution of status visas understood their rights and how to access legal assistance.

We provided information sessions about family violence and other aspects of migration law and practice for non-legal workers in the community sector to ensure greater understanding of migration law issues.

We are currently prioritising the range and reach of our community-based information and education program, so as to ensure timely and proactive engagement in dissemination of information and delivery of targeted capacity building programs.

Advocate

"The number of signatories continues to grow from 83 in 2019 to 113 this year. And as organisations sign up to the Pledge the amount of pro bono assistance grows."

An Active Voice

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

In December 2023, the GRF Legal Community Pledge Framework will be launched.

Refugee Legal is a member of the Core Group which led the development of the Legal Community Pledge.

The development involved input from staff members of the Core Group with lived experience of displacement as well as input from law firms, international and local legal assistance NGOs, refugee-led organisations, refugee lawyers, and others with lived experience of displacement. UNHCR and relevant bodies, such as the Asylum Capacity Support Group and the Global Strategic Litigation Council on Refugee Rights (GSLC), were also consulted.

Signatories to the Pledge commit to 'take action for and with refugees and other displaced people to increase legal assistance and to facilitate

improvements to the systems through which rights, justice, and solutions are accessed.'

They commit to doing so 'in solidarity with displaced people, one another, and other stakeholders as part of a multi-stakeholder initiative that recognizes the mobilization of legal stakeholders is essential to a whole-of-society and whole-of-route approach to refugee response and to the realization of the Global Compact on Refugees' (GCR) four objectives. We acknowledge this mobilization must occur from a local to global level and in partnership with affected populations.'

The number of signatories continues to grow from 83 in 2019 to 113 this year. And as organisations sign up to the Pledge, the amount of pro bono assistance grows.

We attended the UNHCR Annual Tripartite Conference on Resettlement Consultations in Geneva, along with over 250 delegates from around the world.

We consulted with key UN officials, including Gillian Triggs (Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, UNHCR) and others.

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, and consultations with key Federal and State Parliamentarians across the political spectrum.

We briefed the Victorian Government on key issues and needs and our work in relation a wide range of refugee and immigration policy issues.

Meetings and roundtables

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

- TPVs and Afghan human right defenders
- Third country options for 'transitory persons' – people held in offshore detention
- Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT) reform
- TPV/SHEV transition to permanent visa reform
- Alternatives to indefinite detention
- Policy law reform post the change in Federal Government following the 2022 Federal Election
- Resettlement to New Zealand and United States of America for people held in offshore detention
- Crises in Afghanistan, Ukraine, and Myanmar
- Final Departure Bridging Visas for people brought to Australia for medical treatment
- Supports for people in the community seeking asylum, including SRSS
- Visa processing, including addressing primary and merits review delays and backlogs
- Women on temporary visas or without visas experiencing family violence
- Federal Human Rights Act

- Refugee and humanitarian program, including an increased intake and related issues about composition.

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), the 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 (FCLC), Community Legal Centres Australia (CLCS), the National Asylum Policy Advocacy Network (Victoria Branch), the Detention Advocacy Network, Anglicare, Australian

Advocate (cont.)

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 and the Pride Foundation Australia – LGBTIQ+ Refugee and Asylum Seeker Advisory Group.

Submissions

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

- Administrative Review Taskforce: Review of Australia's system of administrative review and proposed establishment of a new federal administrative review body
- Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security Inquiry into the Migration Amendment (Clarifying International Obligations for Removal) Act 2021
- Department of Home Affairs Minister's review of Strategy: A Migration System for Australia's Future (the Parkinson Review)

- Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights' inquiry into Australia's Human Rights Framework
- Department of Home Affairs on amendments to the migration framework to support visa holders experiencing domestic and family violence (DFV) (Joint submission with RAINCLC)

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

Presentations included:

- 'Prime Minister's Apology to Refugees (2030)', 'Injustice, Survival, Memory' Conference, ANU Research School of Humanities and the Arts (Speech)
- Corrs Chambers Westgarth legal staff on our pro bono program
- Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project group on law reform
- NASAVic sector meeting on the TPV/SHEV Conversion to Permanent Visa Program

- Key aid agencies on changes to Afghan visa processing (and assistance with development of advocacy strategy)
- Grandmothers for Refugees on the TPV/SHEV Conversion to permanent visas
- Anne Coombs Memorial Event
- Book launch of Shadowline: The Dunera Diaries of Uwe Radok

Guest lectures included for:

- The Melbourne Law School Human Rights class run by Professor John Tobin
- The Melbourne Law School Refugee Law course run by Professor Michelle Foster, joint lecture with Justice Debra Mortimer
- The Melbourne Law School Human Rights Masters class

Attendance at key events included:

- Melbourne University Law Students' Society Public Interest Law Fair
- Roundtable with the Victorian Attorney-General
- SA Attorney-General's Roundtable on South Australia's Legal Assistance Action Plan

- Ministerial Consultations on the 2022–23 Humanitarian Program
- Legal Information roundtable with national heads of the Ukrainian-Australian community
- Meeting with Co-Chair of the Australian Federation of Ukrainian Organisations
- Federation of Community Legal Centre's Principal Lawyer Annual Meeting

- Tim McCoy Annual Dinner
- Federation of Community Legal Centre's Roundtable with the Honourable Jaclyn Symes MP, Victorian Attorney-General
- Australians for UNHCR World Refugee Week lunch in Sydney

- Official swearing in of her Honour Chief Justice Mortimer
- Department/Legal Service Provider Meetings (weekly) on TPV/SHEV Conversion, and coordinated legal service provider questions and feedback
- Gilbert + Tobin 25 (+1) years pro bono program celebrations

- Meeting with the Official Delegation of the Parliament of Ukraine at Victorian State Parliament
- Meeting with the Australian Human Rights Commissioner
- Meetings with Amnesty International
- The Asia Pacific Meaningful Refugee Participation Roundtable hosted by Asia Pacific Network of Refugees (APNOR)

- Department of Home Affairs – the SRSS Roundtable in Canberra
- Meeting with UNHCR Regional Representative
- Sector Meeting on Policy Reform – hosted by Victoria Legal Aid

- Departmental consultation on Alternatives to Held Detention
- Meeting with Centre for Policy Development
- Deakin University Careers Fair
- The Melbourne Law Society Careers Fair
- Victorian Premier's Iftar Dinner 2023

- Allens' 200-year Gala Dinner
- Sector leaders' roundtable hosted by Victorian Multicultural Commission
- Victorian Multicultural Commission, Gala Dinner
- Victorian Multicultural Committee, Victorian Refugee Awards Ceremony 2023

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 include:



Thanks also to our other major supporters who include, Noel & Carmel O'Brien Family Foundation, Karen McLeod Adair and Anthony Adair, Jack and Hedy Brent Foundation, B & A Miller Foundation, Lettisiar Foundation, Krishna Somers Charitable Trust, Brigitte Smith, 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, 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

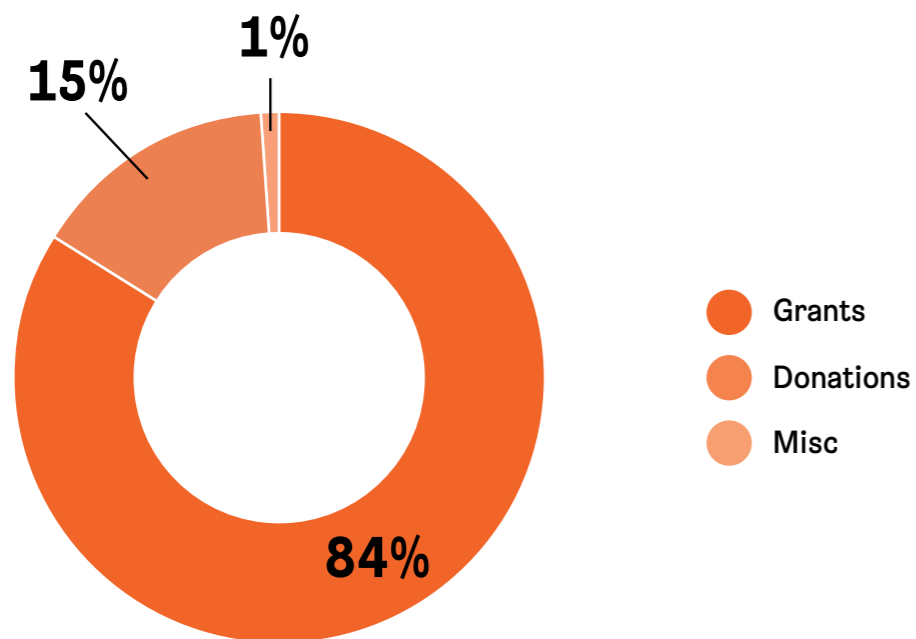


Special thanks go to two of our Ambassadors Tom Ballard and First Dog on the Moon (aka Andrew Marlton) for helping to build our presence, expand our supporter base and raise much needed funds

Treasurer's Report

"Refugee Legal will continue to implement a range of strategies focused on building and diversifying funding sources, together with further leveraging pro bono, volunteer and other in-kind support."

Funding Sources



Treasurer's Report

Refugee Legal is pleased to announce an operating surplus of \$434,328 for the financial year ended 30 June 2023.

Throughout the financial year, Refugee Legal has continued to grow as an organisation. New staff have been employed and new projects pursued.

Our expenditure on ordinary activities increased from \$3,798,613 to \$5,354,732. A significant part of the increased expense was attributable to the cost of work across the Afghanistan Program and the TPV/SHEV Conversion to Permanent Visa Program. The work in these programs and associated financial costs will continue over at least the next three years.

Total income from ordinary activities increased from \$5,773,680 to \$5,789,060. This year our income from ordinary activities included 15% from Donations and 84% 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 the Afghanistan and the TPV/SHEV Conversion to Permanent Visa Program), as well as generous pro bono support from 24 corporate law firms.

As of 30 June 2023, Refugee Legal has a total equity of \$4,394,220 (compared to \$3,959,892 end of 30 June 2022) and total current assets of \$6,537,970 (compared to \$5,377,424 end of 30 June 2022). The total current assets include \$967,450 of grants received in advance to undertake our core services.

Refugee Legal is in a sound financial position for the 2023–24 financial year, particularly in light of grants received in advance to plan and deliver our core services, respond to new and emerging needs and to seize opportunities that present to advocate for reform.

To ensure we continue to operate sustainably, particularly in the context of unprecedented and ever-escalating demand for our services, we will continue to employ a range of essential strategies to secure diversified funding, including from philanthropic foundations, major donors, individual donors from the community and government, as well as generous pro bono and financial support from corporate law firm partners. We will also harness the goodwill, resources, and expertise of volunteers and the broader community to support our work.

Financial Summary

Income and expenditure in summary

Income 2022-23	2023	2022
Other Grants	\$4,840,391	\$4,791,567
Professional Development & Training Courses	\$11,762	\$5,609
Donations	\$891,726	\$935,354
Interest Income	\$8,426	\$5,252
Other Income	\$36,755	\$ 35,898
Total	\$5,789,060	\$5,773,680

Income 2022-23	2023	2022
Auditor's Remuneration	\$5,500	\$6,000
Bank Charges	\$1,233	\$489
Consultants	\$83,752	
Depreciation	\$10,255	\$4,706
General Expenses	\$31,517	\$15,590
Insurance	\$8,732	\$3,946
Interpreters	\$701,184	\$264,996
Postage	\$5,876	\$5,003
Professional Development & Training Courses	\$8,159	\$2,090
Publications & Subscriptions	\$29,722	\$23,071
Refugee Legal SA	\$64,553	\$43,486
Rent	\$321,045	\$178,435
Repairs & Maintenance, Consumables	\$130,863	\$80,620
Salaries (including packaged benefits)	\$3,492,836	\$2,867,803
Stationery, Office Supplies	\$36,919	\$13,301
Staff Training, Seminars & Conferences	\$2,102	\$551
Superannuation	\$332,357	\$254,096
Telephone & Fax	\$10,388	\$13,574
Travel & Accommodation	\$55,572	\$13,936
Workcover	\$22,217	\$6,950
Total	\$5,354,799	\$3,798,613
Surplus after income tax expense	\$434,328	\$1,975,067
Net Assets	\$4,394,220	\$3,959,892

Our Staff

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Business Manager

Linda Budd

Volunteer Coordinator

Harmonie Cribbes

Manager Special Programs

Bianca DeToma

Senior Solicitors

Angela Dwyer

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Senior Policy Solicitors

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Amy Faram

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Clare Hughes

Daniel Macpherson

Drita Halimi

Emma Costa

Filip Gelev

Galen Jaffurs

Gulafshan Akhlaqi

Iona Moller

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Jennifer Blakeman

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Isobel Orford

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Jock Green

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Mary Alem Bekele

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@Refugee Legal

Refugee Legal Statement of Support for a Voice to Parliament

Refugee Legal supports the establishment of a First Nations Voice to Parliament, to be enshrined in the Australian Constitution.

We embrace the invitation in the Uluru Statement from the Heart to walk together in "a movement of the Australian people for a better future".

This is rooted in our support of the three pillars of the Uluru Statement: Voice, Treaty and Truth.

The Voice referendum is a pivotal juncture in the country's history. It presents an opportunity to take a crucial step forward. A step which enshrines Constitutional change empowering reform for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to take their rightful place — to be truly heard.

We recognise that this reform can create a fuller expression of Australia's nationhood.

We further recognise the Voice as a fundamental next step towards removing structural barriers that have caused such deep powerlessness, injustice and harm to First Nations people.

Human dignity and human rights are at the heart of our support for the Voice. Justice and self-determination lie at the core of this. These are also fundamental rights under international law, which affirm the rights of First Nations people, including to self-determination, equality and non-discrimination.

We know from our longstanding experience working with refugees, people seeking asylum and migrants that when governments hear and act on the voices of people with direct experience, it can make a fundamental difference to policy-making which advances rights and lives.

We recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities hold differing views about the Voice. In our support of the Voice, we respect these views and believe in a shared responsibility to listen to different perspectives.

We embrace the invitation to support the Voice as a critical step in a historic movement walking together into a better future for all.

Refugee Legal:

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Asylum seekers

Vulnerable migrants

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